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YOLANDE



YOLANDE

The Story of a Daughter

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'A PRINCESS OF THULE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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YOLANDE.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG THE CLOUDS.

FAR up in the wild and lonely hills that form the backbone, as it were, of eastern Inverness-shire, in the desert solitudes where the Findhorn and the Foyers first begin to draw their waters from a thousand mystic-named or nameless rills, stands the lodge of Allt-nam-ba. The plain little double-gabled building, with its dependencies of kennels, stables, coach-house, and keepers' bothy, occupies a promontory formed by the confluence of two brawling streams; and faces a long, wide, beautiful valley, which terminates in the winding waters of a loch. It is the only sign of habitation in the strangely silent district; and it is the last. The rough hill-road leading to it terminates there. From that

small plateau, divergent corries—softly wooded most of them are, with waterfalls half hidden by birch and rowan trees—stretch up still farther into a sterile wilderness of moor and lochan and bare mountain-top, the haunt of the ptarmigan, the red deer, and the eagle; and the only sound to be heard in these voiceless altitudes is the monotonous murmur of the various burns—the White Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Stream of the Red Lochan, the Stream of the Fairies, the Stream of the Corrie of the Horses, as they are called in the Gaelic.

At the door of this solitary little lodge, on a morning towards the end of July, Yolande Winterbourne was standing, engaged in buttoning on her driving gloves, but occasionally glancing out at the bewildering, changeful, flashing, and gleaming day around her. For, indeed, since she had come to live at Allt-nam-ba she had acquired the conviction that the place seemed very close up to the sky; and that this broad valley, walled in by those great and silent hills, formed a sort of caldron, in which the elements were in the habit of mixing up weather for trans-

ference to the wide world beyond. At this very moment, for example, a continual phantasmagoria of cloud-effects was passing before her eyes. Far mountain-tops grew blacker and blacker in shadow; then the gray mist of the rain stole slowly across and hid them from view; then they reappeared again, and a sudden shaft of sunlight would strike on the yellow-green slopes and on the boulders of wet and glittering granite. But she had this one consolation—that the prospect in front of the lodge was much more reassuring than that behind. Behind—over the mountainous ranges of the moor—the clouds were banking up in a heavy and thunderous purple; and in the ominous silence the streams coming down from the corries sounded loud; whereas, away before her, the valley that led down to the haunts of men was for the most part flooded with brilliant sunlight, and the wind-swept loch was of the darkest and keenest blue. Altogether there was more life and motion here—more colour and brilliancy and change—than in the pale and placid Egyptian landscape she had grown accustomed to; but

there was also—she might have been pardoned for thinking—for one who was about to drive fourteen miles in a dog-cart, a little more anxiety; and she had already resolved to take her waterproof with her.

However, she was not much dismayed. She had lived in this weather-brewing caldron of a place for some little time; and had grown familiar with its threatening glooms, which generally came to nothing; and with its sudden and dazzling glories, which laughed out a welcome to the lonely traveller in the most surprising fashion. When the dog-cart—a four-wheeled vehicle—was brought round, she stepped into it lightly, and took the reins as if to the manner born, though she had never handled a whip until Mrs. Graham had put her in training at Inverstroy. Then there was a strict charge to Jane to see that brisk fires were kept burning in all the rooms; for, although it was still July, the air of these alpine solitudes was sometimes somewhat keen. And then—the youthful and fair-haired Sandy having got up behind—she released the break; and presently they were making their way, slowly and cautiously at first, down the stony

path, and over the loud-sounding wooden bridge that here spans the roaring red-brown waters of the Allt-cam-bán.

But when once they were over the bridge and into the road leading down the wide strath, they quickly mended their pace. There was an unusual eagerness and brightness in her look. Sandy the groom knew that the stout and serviceable cob in the shafts was a sure-footed beast: but the road was of the roughest: and he could not understand how the young English lady, who was generally very cautious, should drive so fast. Was it to get away from the black thunder-masses of cloud that lay over the mountains behind them? Here, at least, there seemed no danger of any storm. The sunlight was brilliant on the wide green pastures and on the flashing waters of the stream: and the steep and sterile hillsides were shining now: and the loch far ahead of them had its wind-rippled surface of a blue like the heart of a sapphire. Yolande's face soon showed the influence of the warm sunlight and of the fresh keen air: and her eyes were glad, though they seemed busy with other things. Indeed, there was

scarcely any sign of life around to attract her attention. The sheep on the vast slopes, where there was but a scanty pasturage among the blocks of granite, were as small gray specks ; an eagle, slowly circling on motionless wing over the farthest mountain-range, looked no bigger than a hawk ; some young falcons, whose cry sounded just overhead among the crags, were invisible. But perhaps she did not heed these things much ? She seemed preoccupied, and yet happy and light-hearted.

When, in due course of time, they reached the end of the valley and got on to the road that wound along the wooded shores of the loch, there was much easier going ; and Sandy dismissed his fears. It was a pretty loch, this stretch of wind-stirred blue water, for the hills surrounding it were somewhat less sterile than those at Allt-nam-ba ; here and there the banks were fringed with hazel, and at the lower end of it, where the river flowing from it wound through a picturesque ravine, were the dark green plantations surrounding Lynn Towers. They had driven for about a mile and a half or so by the shores of the

lake, when Yolande fancied she heard some clanking noise proceeding from the other side; and thereupon she instantly asked Sandy what that could be, for any sound save the bleating of sheep or the croak of a raven was an unusual thing here. The young Highland lad strained his eyes in the direction of the distant hillside; and at last he said—

“Oh yes, I see them now. They will be the men taking up more fencing to the forest. Duncan was speaking about that, madam.”

(For he was a polite youth, as far as his English went.)

“I can’t see anything, Sandy,” said the young lady.

“If Miss Winterbourne would be looking about half-way up the hill—they are by the side of the gray corrie now.”

Then he added, after a second—

“I am thinking that will be the Master at the top.”

“Do you mean the Master of Lynn?” she said, quickly.

“Yes, madam.”

“Well, your eyes are sharper than mine,

Sandy. I can see that black speck on the sky-line, but that is all."

"He is waving a handkerchief now," said Sandy, with much coolness.

"Oh, that is impossible. How could he make us out at this distance?"

"The Master will know there is no other carriage than this one coming from Allt-nam-ba."

"Very well, then," said she, taking out her handkerchief and giving it a little shake or two in the sunlight. "I will take the chance; but you know, Sandy, it is more likely to be one of the keepers waving his hand to you."

"Oh no, madam, it is the Master himself --I am sure of it. He was up at the bothy yesterday evening, to see Duncan about the gillies; and he was saying something about the new fence above the loch."

"Was Mr. Leslie at Allt-nam-ba last night?" said she, in surprise.

"Oh yes, madam."

"And he left no message for me?"

"I think there was not any message. But he was asking when Miss Winterbourne's

father was coming ; and I told him that I was to drive Miss Winterbourne into Foyers this morning."

"Oh, that is all right," she said, with much content.

By this time they had reached the lower end of the lake ; and, when they had crossed the wooden bridge over the river and ascended a bit of a hill, they found themselves opposite Lynn Towers—a large modern building, which, with its numerous conservatories, stood on a level piece of ground on the other side of the ravine. Then on again, and in time they beheld stretching out before them a wide and variegated plain, looking rich and fertile and cultivated after the mountainous solitudes they had left behind ; while all around them were hanging woods, with open slopes of pasture, and rills running down to the river in the valley beneath. As they drove on and down into that smiling and shining country, the day grew more and more brilliant. The breaks of blue in the sky grew broader ; the silver-gleaming clouds went slowly by to the east ; and the air, which was much warmer down here, was

perfumed with the delicate resinous odour of the sweet-gale. Wild flowers grew more luxuriantly. Here and there a farm-house appeared, with fields of grain encroaching on the moorland. And at last, after some miles of this gradual descent, Yolande arrived at a little sprinkling of houses sufficient in number—though much scattered among the fields—to be called a village; and drew up at the small wooden gate of a modest little mansion, very prettily situated in the midst of a garden of roses, columbine, nasturtiums, and other cottage favourites.

No sooner had the carriage stopped than instantly the door was opened by a smiling and comely dame, with silver-gray hair and pleasant, shrewd, gray eyes, who came down the garden path. She was neatly and plainly dressed, in a housekeeper-looking kind of costume, but her face was refined and intelligent; and there was a sort of motherliness, as well as very obvious kindness, in the look with which she regarded the young English lady.

“Do you know that I meant to scold you, Mrs. Bell, for robbing your garden again?”

said Yolande. "But this time—no—I am not going to scold you, I can only thank you, for my papa is coming to-day; and oh, you should see how pretty the rooms are with the flowers you sent me. But not again, now—not any more destroying the garden——"

"Dear me, and is your papa coming the day?" said the elderly woman, in a slow, persuasive, gentle, south-country sort of fashion.

"I am going now to meet him at the steamer," said Yolande, quickly. "That is why——"

"Well now," said Mrs. Bell, "that is just a most extraordinary piece of good luck; for I happen to have a pair of the very finest and plumpest young ducklings that ever I set eyes on——"

"No, no; no, no, no!" Yolande cried, laughing. "I cannot have any more excuses for these kindnesses and kindnesses. Every day since I came here—every day a fresh excuse—and always the boy coming with Mrs. Bell's compliments——"

"Dinna ye think I know perfectly well," said the other, in a tone of half-indignant

remonstrance, “what it is for a young leddy to be trying housekeeping in a place like yon? So there’s not to be another word about it; ye’ll jist stop for a minute as ye’re going back, and take the ducklings wi’ ye; ay, and I’ve got a nice bunch or two o’ fresh-cut lettuce for ye, and a few carrots and turnips—I declare it’s a shame to see the things wasting in the gairden, for we canna use the half of them——”

“Wouldn’t it be simpler for you to give me the garden and the house and everything all at once?” said Yolande. “Well, now, I wish to see Mr. Melville.”

“Ye canna do that,” was the prompt reply.

“Why?” said the girl, with something of a stare; for she had not been in the habit of having her requests refused up in this part of the world.

“He is at his work,” said the elderly dame, glancing at a small building that stood at right angles with the house. “Do ye think I would disturb him when he is at his work? Do ye think I want him to send me about my business?”

“There is a tyrant!” exclaimed Yolande.

“Never mind, then ; I wanted to thank him for sending me the trout. Now I will not. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Bell ; I will take the vegetables, and be very grateful to you ; but not the ducklings——”

“Ye’ll just take the ducklings, as I say, like a sensible young leddy,” said Mrs. Bell, with emphasis, “and there is not to be another word about it.”

So on she drove again, on this bright and beautiful July day, through a picturesque and rocky and rugged country, until in time she reached the end of her journey—the charming little hotel that is perched high amid the woods overlooking Loch Ness, within sound of the thundering Foyers Water. And as she had hurried mainly to give the cob a long mid-day rest—the steamer not being due till the afternoon,—she now found herself with some hours’ leisure at her disposal, which she spent in idly wandering through the umbrageous woods, startling many a half-tame pheasant, but never coming on the real object of her quest, a roe-deer. And then, at last, she heard the throbbing of paddle wheels in the intense silence ; and, just about as quick as

any roe-deer, she made her way down through the bracken and the bushes, and went right out to the end of the little pier.

She made him out at once, even at that distance ; for though he was not a tall man, his sharp-featured, sun-reddened face and silver-white hair made him easily recognisable. And of course she was greatly delighted when he came ashore, and excited too ; and she herself would have carried gun-cases, fishing-baskets, and what not, to the dog-cart, had not the boots from the hotel interfered. And she had a hundred eager questions and assurances, but would pay no heed to his remonstrance about the risks of her driving.

“ Why, papa, I drove every day at Inverstroy ! ” she exclaimed, as they briskly set out for Allt-nam-ba.

“ I suppose the Grahams were very kind to you ? ” he said.

“ Oh, yes, yes, yes ! ”

“ And the Master, how is he ? ”

“ Oh, very well, I believe. Of course I have not seen him since Mrs. Graham left. But he has made all the arrangements for you—ponies, panniers, everything quite

arranged. And he left the rifle at the bothy, and I have the cartridges all right from Inverness—oh yes, you will find everything prepared; and there is no want of provision, for Mr. Melville sends me plenty of trout, and Duncan goes up the hill now and again for a hare, and they are sending me a sheep from the farm——”

“A sheep!”

“Duncan said it was the best way, to have a sheep killed. And we have new-laid eggs and fresh milk every day. And every one is so kind and attentive, papa, that whatever turns out wrong that will be my fault in not arranging properly——”

“Oh, that will be all right,” said he, good-humouredly. “I want to hear about yourself, Yolande. What do you think of Lord Lynn and his sister, now that you have seen something more of them?”

This question checked her volubility, and for a second a very odd expression came over her face.

“They are very serious people, papa,” said she, with some caution; “and—and very pious, I think.”

“But I suppose you are as pious as they can be?” her father said. “That is no objection.”

She was silent.

“And those other people—the old woman who pretends to be a housekeeper and is a sort of good fairy in disguise, and the penniless young laird who has no land——”

Instantly her face brightened up..

“Oh, he is the most extraordinary person, papa—a magician! I cannot describe it; you must see for yourself; but really it is wonderful. He has a stream to work for him—yes—for Mrs. Graham and I went and visited it—climbing away up the hills—and there was the water-wheel at work in the water, and a hut close by, and there were copper wires to take the electricity away down to the house, where he has a store of it. It is a genie for him; he makes it light the lamps in the house, in the schoolroom, and it makes electrotype copies for him; it works a lathe for turning wood—oh, I can’t tell you all about it. And he has been so kind to me; but mostly in secret, so that I could not catch him to thank him. How

could I know? I complain to Mrs. Bell that it is a trouble to send to Inverness for some one to set the clock going; the next morning—it is all right. It goes; nothing wrong at all! Then the broken window in the drawing-room; Mrs. Graham and I drive away to Fort Augustus: when I come back in the evening there is a new pane put in. Then the filter in the water-tank up the hill——”

“ But what on earth is this wonderful Jack-of-all-trades doing here? Why, you yourself wrote to me, Yolande, that he had taken the Snell Exhibition and the Ferguson Scholarship, and blazed like a comet through Balliol; and now I find him tinkering at windowpanes——”

She laughed.

“ I think he works very hard; he says he is very lazy. He is very fond of fishing; he is not well off; and here he is permitted to fish in the lakes far away among the hills that few people will take the trouble to go to. Then naturally he has much interest in this neighbourhood, where once his people were the great family; and those living here have

a great respect for him ; and he has built a school and teaches in it—it is a free school, no charge at all," Yolande added hastily. " That is Mrs. Bell's kindness, the building of the school. Then he makes experiments and discoveries : is it not enough of an occupation when every one is talking about the electric light ? Also he is a great botanist ; and when it is not school time, he is away up in the hills, after rare plants, or to fish. Oh, it is terrible the loneliness of the small lakes up in the hills, Mr. Leslie has told me ; no road, no track, no life anywhere. And the long hours of climbing : oh, I am sure I have been sorry sometimes—many times—when day after day I receive a present of trout and a message, to think of the long climbing and the labour——"

" But why doesn't he fish in the loch at Allt-nam-ba ?" her father exclaimed. " That can't be so difficult to get at."

" He had permission last year," said she.

" Why not this ?"

" He thought it would be more correct to wait for you to give permission."

" Well, now, Yolande," said he, peevishly,

“how could you be so stupid! Here is a fellow who shows you all sorts of kindnesses, and you haven’t enough common sense to offer him a day’s fishing in the loch!”

“It was not my affair,” she said, cheerfully.
“That was for you to arrange.”

“Waiting for permission to fish in a loch like that!” her father said, more good-naturedly—for indeed his discontent with Yolande rarely lasted for more than about the fifteenth part of a second. “Leslie told me the loch would be infinitely improved if five-sixths of the fish were netted out of it; the trout would run to a better size. However, Miss Yolande, since you’ve treated him badly, you must make amends. You must ask him to dinner.”

“Oh yes, papa; I shall be glad to do that,” she said, blithely.

“If the house is anywhere near the road, we can pick him up as we go along. Then I suppose you could send a message to the Master; he is not likely to have an engagement.”

“But you don’t mean for to-night!” she said, in amazement.

“I do, indeed. Why not?”

“What! The first night that we have to ourselves together, to think of inviting strangers?”

“Strangers?” he repeated. “That is an odd phrase to be used by a young lady who wears an engaged ring.”

“But I am not married yet, papa,” said she, flushing slightly. “I am only engaged. When I am a wife, it may be different; but at present I am your daughter.”

“And you would rather that we had this first evening all by ourselves?”

“It is not a wish, papa,” said she, coolly. “It is a downright certainty. There is only dinner for two; and there will be only dinner for two; and these two are you and I. Do you forget that I am mistress of the house?”

Well, he seemed nothing loth; the prospect did not at all overcloud his face—as they drove away through this smiling and cheerful and picturesque country, with the severer altitudes beyond gradually coming into view.

That same night Yolande and her father set out for an arm-in-arm stroll away down the broad silent valley. It was late; but still

there was a bewilderment of light all around them ; for in the north-western heavens the wan twilight still lingered ; while behind them, in the south-east, the moon had arisen, and now projected their shadows before them as they walked. Yolande was talkative and joyous—the silence and the loneliness of the place did not seem to oppress her ; and he was always a contented listener. They walked away along the strath, under the vast solitudes of the hills, and by the side of this winding and murmuring stream ; and in time they reached the loch. For a wonder it was perfectly still. The surface was like glass ; and those portions that were in shadow were black as jet. But these were not many, for the moonlight was shining adown this wide space, touching softly the overhanging crags and the woods, and showing them—as they got on still farther—above the loch and the bridge and the river, and standing silent amid the silent plantations, the pale white walls of Lynn.

“And so you think, Yolande,” said he, “that you will be quite happy in living in this solitary place ?”

“If you were always to be away—oh no ; but with you coming to see me sometimes, as now, oh yes, yes—why not ?” said she, cheerfully.

“You wouldn’t mind being cut off from the rest of the world ?” he said.

“I ?” she said. “What is it to me ? I know so few people elsewhere.”

“It would be a peaceful life, Yolande,” said he, thoughtfully. “Would it not ?”

“Oh yes,” she answered, brightly. “And then, papa, you would take Allt-nam-ba for the whole year, every year, and not merely have a few weeks’ shooting in the autumn. Why should it not be a pleasant place to live in ? Could anything be more beautiful than to-night—and the solitude ? And one or two of the people are so kind. But this I must tell you, papa, that the one who has been kindest to me here is not Lord Lynn, nor his sister, Mrs. Colquhoun, nor any one of them, but Mrs. Bell ; and the first chance, when she is sure not to meet Mr. Melville, or Mr. Leslie—for she is very particular about that, and pretends only to be a housekeeper—I am going to bring her up to Allt-nam-ba ;

and you will see how charming she is, and how good and wise and gentle, and how proud she is of Mr. Melville. As for him, he laughs at her. He laughs at every one. He has no respect for any one more than another; he talks to Lord Lynn as he talks to Duncan—perhaps with more kindness to Duncan. Rich or poor, it is no difference—no, he does not seem to understand that there is a difference. And all the people, the shepherds, the gillies, and Mrs. Macdougal at the farm—every one thinks there is no one like him. Perhaps I have learnt a little from him, even in so short a time? —it may be. I do not care that Mrs. Bell has been a cook; that is nothing to me; I see that she is a good woman, and clever, and kind; and I will be her friend if she pleases; and I know that he gives her more honour than to any one else, though he does not say much. No, he is too sarcastic; and not very courteous. Sometimes he is almost rude; but he is a little more considerate with old people——”

“Look here, Yolande,” her father said, with a laugh, “all this afternoon, and all this

evening, and all down this valley, you have done nothing but talk about this wonderful Mr. Melville—although you say you have scarcely ever seen him——”

“ No, no, no, papa ! I said, when he had done any kindness to me, he had kept out of the way, and I had no chance to thank him.”

“ Very well, all your talking has produced nothing but a jumble. I want to see this laird without land, this Balliol clockmaker, this fisherman schoolmaster, this idol who is worshipped by the natives. Let me see what he is like, first of all. Ask him to dinner—and the Master too. We have few neighbours, and we must make the most of them. So now let us get back home again, child ; though it is almost a shame to go indoors on such a night. And you don’t really think you would regret being shut off from the world, Yolande, in this solitude ?”

She was looking along the still loch, and the wooded shores, and the moonlit crags that were mirrored in the glassy water ; and her eyes were happy enough.

“ Is it not like fairy-land, papa. How

could one regret living in such a beautiful place? Besides," she added, cheerfully, "have I not promised?" And therewith she held out her ungloved hand for a second; and he understood what she meant, for he saw the three diamonds on her engagement-ring clear in the moonlight.

CHAPTER II.

“MELVILLE’S WELCOME HOME.”

AMID all the hurry and bustle of preparing for the Twelfth, Yolande and her affairs seemed half forgotten ; and she, for one, was glad to forget them ; for she rejoiced in the activity of the moment, and was proud to see that the wheels of the little household worked very smoothly. And long ago she had mastered all the details about the luncheon to be sent up the hill, and the dinner for the gillies, and what not ; she had got her instructions from Mrs. Graham at Inverstroy.

In the midst of all this, however, the Master of Lynn wrote the following note to his sister :—

“Lynn Towers, August 8.

“DEAR POLLY—I wish to goodness you would come over here for a couple of days, and put matters straight. I am helpless. I go for a little quiet to Allt-nam-ba. I would

ask Jack Melville to interfere ; but he is so blunt-tongued he would most likely make the row worse. Of course it's all Tabby : if ever I succeed to Lynn won't I make the old cat skip out of that. I expected my father to be cross when I suggested something about Yolande ; but I thought he would see the reasonableness, etc. But Tabby heard of it ; and then it was all 'alliance with demagogues,' 'disgrace of an ancient family,' 'the Leslie's selling their honour for money,' and other rubbish. I don't mind. It doesn't hurt me. I have not knocked about with Jack Melville for nothing ; I can distinguish between missiles that are made of air and pass by you, and missiles that are made of granite or wood, and can cut your head open. But the immediate thing is this : they won't call on the Winterbournes ; and this is not only a gross courtesy, but very impolitic. I should not at all wonder if Mr. Winterbourne has a good season this year, if he were to take a lease of Allt-nam-ba ; and Duncan is reckoning on 1200 brace. As a good tenant, my father ought to call on Mr. Winterbourne, if for nothing else. And, of course, matters

cannot remain as they are. There must be an explanation. What I am dreadfully afraid of is that Yolande may meet Tabby some day, and that Tabby may say something. At present they have only met driving—I mean since you left—so that was only a case of bowing. To hear Tabby talk would make you laugh ; but it makes me rather wild, I confess ; and though my father says less, or nothing at all, I can see that what she says is making him more and more determined. So do come along, and bring some common sense into the atmosphere of the house. What on earth has politics got to do with Yolande ? Come and fight it out with Tabby.

—Your affectionate brother,

“ A. LESLIE.”

This was the answer that arrived on the evening of the next day :—

“ Inverstroy, August 9.

“ DEAR ARCHIE—You must have gone mad. We have five visitors in the house already, and by the day after to-morrow we shall be full to the hall-door. It is quite absurd ; Jim has not asked a single bachelor this year ;

and every man who is coming is bringing his wife. Did you ever hear of such a thing—really I can't understand why women should be such fools: not a single invitation refused! But there is one thing—*they will get a good dose of grouse-talk before they go south*; and if they are not heartily sick of hearing about stags it will be a wonder. So you see, my dear Master, you must worry out of that muddle in your own way; and I have no doubt you got into it through temper, and being uncivil to Aunt Colquhoun. It is impossible for me to leave Inverstroy at present. But, whatever you do, don't get spiteful and go and run away with *Shena Vān*.—Your affectionate sister,

"POLLY."

Well, it was not until the eve of the Twelfth that Yolande gave her first dinner-party; the delay having chiefly been occasioned by their having to wait for some wine from Inverness. This was a great concession on the part of her father; but when he discovered that she was desperately afraid that her two guests, the Master of Lynn and Mr.

Melville, would imagine that the absence of wine from the table was due to her negligence and stupidity as a housekeeper, he yielded at once. Nay, in case they might throw any blame on her of any kind, her father himself wrote to a firm in Inverness, laying strict injunctions on them as to brands and so forth. All of which trouble was quite thrown away, as it turned out, for both the young men seemed quite indifferent about drinking anything; but the wine was there, and Yolande could not be blamed: that was his chief and only consideration.

Just before dinner Mr. Winterbourne, Yolande, and the Master were standing outside the lodge, looking down the wide glen, which was now flooded with sunset light. Young Leslie's eyes were the eyes of a deer-stalker; the slightest movement anywhere instantly attracted them; and when two sheep—little dots they were, at the far edge of the hill just above the lodge—suddenly ceased grazing and lifted their heads, he knew there must be some one there. The next moment a figure appeared on the sky-line.

“I suppose that is Jack Melville,” he said,

peevishly. "I wish he wouldn't come across the forest when he is up at his electric boxes."

"But does he do harm?" said Yolande. "He cannot shoot deer with copper wires."

"Oh, he's all over the place," said the Master of Lynn. "And there isn't a keeper or a watcher who will remonstrate with him; and of course I can't. He's always after his botany, or his fishing, or something. The best thing about it is that he is a capital hand to have with you if there are any stray deer about, and you want to have a shot without disturbing the herd. He knows their ways most wonderfully, and can tell you the track they are certain to take."

Meanwhile the object of these remarks was coming down the hillside at a swinging pace; and very soon he had crossed the little bridge, and was coming up the path—heralding his arrival with a frank and careless greeting to his friends. He was a rather tall, lean, large-boned and powerful-looking man of about eight-and-twenty; somewhat pale in face, seeing that he lived so much out-of-doors; his hair a raven black; his eyes gray, penetrating, and steadfast; his mouth firm, and

yet mobile and expressive at times ; his forehead square rather than lofty ; his voice, a chest-voice, was heard in pleasant and well-modulated English ; he had not acquired any trace of the high falsetto that prevails (or prevailed a few years ago ?) among the young men at Oxford. As for his manner, that was characterised chiefly by a curious simplicity and straightforwardness. He seemed to have no time to be self-conscious. When he spoke to any one, it was without thought or heed of any bystander. With that one person he had to do. Him or her he seized, with look and voice ; and even after the most formal introduction he would speak to you in the most simple and direct way, as if life were not long enough to be wasted in conventionalities ; as if truth were the main thing ; as if all human beings were perfectly alike ; and as if there was no reason in the world why this new stranger should not be put on the footing of a friend. If he had an affectation, it was to represent himself as a lazy and indolent person, who believed in nothing, and laughed at everything, whereas he was extremely industrious and indefatigable ; while there were

certainly two or three things that he believed in—more, perhaps, than he would confess.

"Here, Miss Winterbourne," said he, "is the little vasculum I spoke to you about; it has seen some service, but it may do well enough. And here is Bentley's *Manual*; and a *Flora*. The *Flora* is an old one; I brought an old one purposely, for at the beginning there is a synopsis of the Linnæan system of classification, and you will find that the easiest way of making out the name of a new plant. Of course," he added, when he had put the vasculum and the books on the window-sill and come back, "when you get farther on; when you begin to see how all these plants have grown to be what they are; when you come to study the likenesses and relationships—and unless you mean to go so far you are only wasting time to begin—you will follow Jussieu and De Candolle; but in the meantime you will find the Linnæan system a very dodgy instrument when you are in a difficulty. Then, another thing—mind, I am assuming that you mean business—if you want to frivvle, and pick pretty poses, I shut my door on you—but, I say, if you

mean business, I have told Mrs. Bell you are to have access to my herbarium, whether I am there or not——”

But here Yolande began to laugh.

“Oh yes, that is so probable!” said she. “Mrs. Bell allowing me to go into your study!——”

“Mrs. Bell and I understand each other very well, I assure you,” he said, gravely. “We are only two augurs, who wink at each other; or rather we shut our eyes to each other’s humbug——”

“Why, Jack, she means to buy back Monaglen for you!” the Master of Lynn exclaimed.

“I know she has some romantic scheme of that sort in her head,” he said, frankly. “It is quite absurd. What should I do with Monaglen? However, in the meantime I have made pretty free use of the old lady’s money at Gress; and she is highly pleased, for she was fond of my father’s family, and she likes to hear me spoken well of, and you can so easily purchase gratitude—especially with somebody else’s money. You see, it works well all round. Mrs. Bell, who is an

honest, shrewd, good, kindly woman, sees that her charity is administered with some care ; the people around—but especially the children—are benefited ; I have leisure for any little experiments and my idle rambles ; and if Mrs. Bell and I hoodwink each other, it is done very openly, and there is no great harm."

"She was very indignant," said young Leslie, laughing, "when you wouldn't have your name put on the tablet in the school-house."

"What tablet?" said Yolande.

"Oh, a tablet saying that Mr. Melville had built the school and presented it to the people of Gress."

"And I never contributed a farthing!" he said. "She did the whole thing. Well, now, that shows how artificial the position is ; and, necessarily, it won't last. We have for so long been hypocrites for the public good—let us say it was for the public good ; but there must come an end."

"Why, Jack, if you leave Gress you'll fairly break the old dame's heart. And as for the neighbourhood—it will be like the going away of Aikendrum."

“Who was that?” said Yolande.

“I am sure I don’t know. Mrs. Bell will sing the song for you, if you ask her; she knows all those old things. I don’t know who the gentleman was; but they made a rare fuss about his going away.

‘ ‘Bout him the carles were gabbin’
The braw laddies sabbin’,
And a’ the lasses greetin’
For that Aikendrum’s awa’.”

“The dinner is ready, madam,” said a soft-voiced and pretty Highland maid-servant, appearing at the door; and Yolande’s heart sank within her. She summoned up her courage, nevertheless; she walked into the room sedately, and took her place at the head of the table with much graciousness, though she was in reality very nervous and terribly anxious about the result of this wild experiment. Well, she need not have been anxious. The dinner was excellently cooked, and very fairly served. And if those two younger men seemed quite indifferent as to what they ate and drank, and much more interested in a discussion about certain educational matters, at least Mr. Winterbourne noted and ap-

proved ; and greatly comforted was she from time to time to hear him say : "Yolande, this is capital hare soup ; why can't we get hare soup cooked in this way in the south ?" or "Yolande, these are most delicious trout. Mr. Melville's catching, I suppose ? It seems to me you've stumbled on an uncommonly good cook ;" or "What ? Another robbery of Mrs. Bell's poultry-yard ? Well, they're fine birds—noble, noble. We must send her some grouse to-morrow, Yolande."

And then outside there was a sudden and portentous growl of bass drones ; and then the breaking away into the shrill clear music of a quickstep ; and through the blue windowpanes they could see in the dusk the tall, tightly - built figure of young Duncan, the pipes over his shoulder, marching erect and proud up and down the gravel-path. That was the proper way to hear the pipes—away up there in the silence of the hills, amid the gathering gloom of the night ; and now they would grow louder and shriller as he drew near, and now they would grow fainter and fainter as he passed by ; while all around them, whether the music was faint or shrill, was the

continuous hushed murmur of the mountain streams.

“I told Duncan,” said Yolande to the Master, “that it was a shame he should keep all his playing for the shepherds in the bothy. And he told me that he very well knew the *Hills of Lynn*.”

Young Leslie regarded her with an odd kind of smile.

“You don’t think that is the *Hills of Lynn*, do you, Yolande?”

“Is it not? I have heard very few.”

“No; I am not first favourite to-night. It isn’t the *Hills of Lynn*. That is *Melville’s Welcome Home*.”

Yolande looked surprised, but not in any way guilty.

“I assure you, Miss Winterbourne,” said Jack Melville, pleasantly enough, “that I don’t feel at all hurt or insulted. I know Duncan means no sarcasm. He is quite well aware that we haven’t had a home to welcome us this many a day; but he is not playing the quickstep out of irony. He and I are too old friends for that.”

“Oh, I am sure he does not mean any-

thing like that," said Yolande. "It is a great compliment he means, is it not?"

Then coffee came; and cigars and pipes were produced; and as Yolande had no dread of tobacco-smoke, they all remained together, drawing in their chairs to the brisk fire of wood and peat, and forming a very friendly, snug, and comfortable little circle. Nor was their desultory chatting about educational projects solely; nor, on the other hand, was it confined to grouse and the chances of the weather; it rambled over many and diverse subjects, while always, from time to time, could be heard in the distance (for Duncan had retired to regale his friends in the bothy) the faint echoes of *The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar* or *Mackenzie's Farewell to Sutherland*, or *The Barren Rocks of Aden*, with occasionally the sad, slow wail of a Lament — *Lord Lovat's* or *Mackintosh's*, or *MacCrimmon's*. And as Mr. Melville proved to be a very ready talker (as he lay back there in an easy-chair, with the warm rays of the fire lighting up his fine, intellectual features and clear and penetrating gray eyes) Mr. Winterbourne had an abundant opportunity

of studying this new friend ; and so far from observing in him any of the browbeating and brusqueness he had heard of, on the contrary, he discovered the most ample tolerance, and, more than that, a sort of large-hearted humanity, a sympathy, a sincerity and directness of speech, that began to explain to him why Mr. Melville of Gress was such a favourite with those people about there. He seemed to assume that the person he was talking to was his friend, and that it was useless to waste time in formalities of conversation. His manner towards Yolande (her father thought) was characterised by just a little too much of indifference ; but then he was a schoolmaster, and not in the habit of attaching importance to the opinions of young people.

It was really a most enjoyable, confidential, pleasant evening ; but it had to come to an end ; and when the two young men left, both Yolande and her father accompanied them to the door. The moon was risen now, and the long wide glen looked beautiful enough.

“ Well, now, Mr. Melville,” said Mr. Winterbourne as they were going away,

"whenever you have an idle evening, I hope you will remember us and take pity on us."

"You may see too much of me."

"That is impossible," said Yolande, quickly; and then she added very prettily: "You know, Mr. Melville, if you come often enough you will find it quite natural that Duncan should play for you *Melville's Welcome Home*."

He stood for a moment uncertain; it was the first sign of embarrassment he had shown that night.

"Well," said he, "that is the most friendly thing that has been said to me for many a day. Who could resist such an invitation? Good-night—good-night!"

CHAPTER III.

NEIGHBOURS.

JOHN SHORTLANDS, as it turned out, could not come north till the 20th ; so Mr. Winterbourne asked young Leslie to shoot with him for the first week ; and the invitation had been gratefully accepted. The obligation, however, was not all on one side. The Master of Lynn was possessed of a long and familiar experience of the best and swiftest methods of getting the birds sent to a good market ; and he made his arrangements in this direction with a business-like forethought which amused Mr. Winterbourne, who expressed some whimsical scruples over his being transformed into a game-dealer.

“I don’t look at it in that light at all,” the Master said, coolly. “Game is the only thing land like that will produce ; and I like to know what it is worth. I think I can guarantee that the hire of the gillies and

ponies and panniers won't cost you a farthing."

"You should not be so anxious to have your own moor hard shot," said Mr. Winterbourne, with a smile.

"But I am," said this shrewd young man. "There is no danger on ground like this of too small a breeding-stock being left. It is all the other way. What I am afraid of is too big a stock, and the disease coming along. That is a terrible business. You are congratulating yourself on the number of birds, and on their fine condition; and some pleasant morning you wake up to find the place swept clean."

"Not in one night?"

"Well, a day or two will do it. This epidemic is quite different from the ordinary mild forms of disease, where you can see the birds pining away to death. Instead of that you find them all about among the heather, dead, but perfectly plump and well-looking, not a sign of disease outside or in. So, if you please, Mr. Winterbourne, don't have any scruples about turning on Duncan if you think we are not doing well enough. The

bigger consignments we can send off the better."

Now one consequence of this arrangement was that when Yolande, in the morning, had said "Good-bye, papa!" and "Good-bye, Archie!" and given each of them a flower or some such trifle (for in that part of the country the presentation of a small gift, no matter what, to any one going shooting, is supposed to bring good luck), and when she had seen that luncheon was quite prepared to be sent up the hill when the first pony left, she found herself with the whole day before her, with no companion, and with no occupation save that of wandering down the glen or up one of the hillsides in search of new flowers. It is not to be wondered at, then, that she should seek some variety by occasionally driving into Gress, when the dog-cart was taking the game shot the day before to Foyers, and spending a few hours with Mrs. Bell until the trap came back to pick her up again. For one thing, when she discovered some plant unknown to her, she found it much easier to consult Mr. Melville's herbarium than to puzzle over the descriptions of the various

species in the *Flora*; and as he was generally occupied either in the schoolhouse or in his laboratory, she did not interfere with him. But the truth is, she liked this shrewd, kindly, wise old Scotchwoman, who was the only one in the neighbourhood who took any notice of her. The people at the Towers had neither called nor made any other overtures. And as Mrs. Bell's thoughtfulness and kindness took the substantial form of sending up to Allt-nam-ba, pretty nearly every day, some article or articles likely to be of use to the young housekeeper, of course Yolande had to drive in to thank her.

“Mrs. Bell,” said she, one warm and sunny afternoon, when they were together in the garden (this good woman made awful havoc among her flowers when Yolande came to see her), “who was Aikendrum?”

“A young lad who went away for a sodger—so the song says.”

“And every one was so sorry, is it not so?” said this tall young lady, who already had her hands full of flowers. “The Master was saying that, if Mr. Melville leaves here, every one will be quite as sorry—it will be like the going away of Aikendrum.”

“Why should he go?” said Mrs. Bell, sharply. “Why should he not stay among his own people—yes, and on land that may be his own one day?” And then she added more gently: “It is not a good thing for one to be away among strangers; there’s many a sore heart comes o’ that. It’s not only them that are left behind, sometimes it’s the one that goes away that is sorrowfu’ enough about it. I daresay, now, ye never heard o’ an old Scotch song they call ‘The sun rises bright in France’?”

“Oh, will you sing it for me?” said Yolande, eagerly; for indeed the reputation of this good dame for the singing of those old Scotch songs was wide in that district: though it was not every one whom she would honour. And her singing was strangely effective. She had but little of a voice; she crooned rather than sang; but she could give the words a curiously pathetic quality; and she had the natural gift of knowing what particular airs she could make tell.

She laid her hand on Yolande’s arm—as if to ask for attention—

*“ The sun rises bright in France,
And fair sets he ;
But he has tint the blink he had
In my ain countrie.
It's no my ain ruin
That weets aye my e'e,
But the dear Marie I left behind
Wi' sweet bairnies three.”*

“ Ye've no heard that before ?”

“ Oh no. It is a very sad air. But why
Marie ?—that is French.”

“ Well, ye see, the French and the Scotch
were very thick¹ in former days ; and Marie
was a common name in Scotland. I am told
they spoke nothing but French at Holyrood ;
and the young gentlemen, they were all for
joining the French service——”

“ But is there no more of the song, Mrs.
Bell ?”

“ Oh, ay ; there are other two verses.
But it's no for an auld wife like me to be
singing havers.”

“ Please !”

“ Very well, then—

*‘ The bud comes back to summer,
And the blossom to the tree,*

¹ Thick—intimate.

‘ *But I win back—oh, never,
 To my ain countrie.
 Gladness comes to many,
 Sorrow comes to me,
 As I look o’er the wide ocean
 To my ain countrie.*

‘ *Fu’ bienly low’d my ain hearth,
 And smiled my ain Marie :
 Oh ! I’ve left my heart behind
 In my ain countrie !
 O I’m leal to high heaven,
 Which aye was leal to me !
 And it’s there I’ll meet ye a’ soon,
 Frae my ain countrie.”¹*

“ It is a beautiful air—but so sad,” Yolande said ; and then she added slyly, “ and now *Aikendrum*.”

But Mrs. Bell doggedly refused.

“ I tell ye it’s no for an auld wife like me to be fashing with such blethers ; it’s for young lassies when they’re out at the herding. And I hope, now, that ye are no likely to put any *Aikendrum* notions into Mr. Melville’s head. Let him stay where he is. Maybe we’ll get him a better stance² in the country—

¹ The words of this song are by Allan Cunningham ; the music is an old Celtic air.

² Stance—holding or position.

side soon ; stranger things have come to pass."

"I ?" said Yolande ; "is it likely I should wish him to go away ? Perhaps you do not know, then, that I am going to live in this neighbourhood—no ?"

"Oh, indeed ; is that possible noo ?" said Mrs. Bell—and she would say no more. She was herself most kindly and communicable ; but always she preserved a certain reserve of manner in a case like this—it was not her "place" to betray curiosity. However, Yolande was quite frank.

"Oh yes," said the young lady, cheerfully. "Of course I must live here when I am married ; and of course, too, I look forward to seeing Mr. Melville always. He will be our nearest friend—almost the only one. But it is so difficult to catch him. Either he is in the school ; or he is up at the water-wheel—why, this moment, now, if I could see him, I would ask him to drive out to Allt-nam-ba, when the carriage comes, and stay to dine with us."

"I wish ye would—eh, I wish ye would, my dear young leddy !" the old dame ex-

claimed. “For the way he goes on is just distressing! Not a settled proper meal will he sit down to! nothing but a piece of cold meat aye to be standing by. There it is—in there among they smelling chemical things—day and night there must aye be the same thing on the side table waiting for him—some cold meat, a bit o’ bread, and a wee, scrimpit, half-pint bottle o’ that fushionless claret-wine that is not one preen point better than vinegar. And then when he gives the bairns a day’s holiday, and starts away for Loch-na-lairige—a place that no one has ever won to but the shepherds—not a thing in his pocket but a piece o’ bread and cheese. How he keeps up his strength—a big-boned man like that—passes me. If ye want to anger him, that’s the way to do it—compel him to sit doon to a respectable meal and get the lasses to prepare a few things for him in a clever kind o’ way as ye would get in any Christian house. Well, many a time I think if that’s the mainner they train young men at Oxford they would be better brought up at another place. And what is the use of it? His means are far beyond his wants—I take

care there is no wasterfulness in the house-keeping, for one thing ; and even if they were not, is there not my money ?—and a proud woman I would be that day that he would take a penny of it ! ”

At this moment the object of these remarks came out of the laboratory—a small building standing at right angles with the house—and he was buttoning his coat as if he had just put it on.

“ Good afternoon, Miss Winterbourne,” said he, and he seemed very pleased to see her as he took her hand for a second. “ I thought I heard your voice. And I have got a word of approval for you.”

“ Oh indeed ? ” said she, smiling ; for occasionally his schoolmaster air and his condescending frankness amused her.

“ I had a look over my herbarium last night ; you have been very careful.”

“ You thought I should not be ? ”

“ I did not know. But if there had been any confusion or mischief done, I should not have mentioned it—no, probably I should have let you have your will ; only, I would never have allowed any one else to go near

the place ; so, you see, you would have been inflicting injury on an unknown number of persons in the future.”

“But how wrong not to tell me!” she exclaimed.

“Oh you have been careful enough. Indeed you have taken unnecessary trouble. It is quite enough if the different genera are kept separate ; it is not necessary that the species should follow in the same order as they are in the *Flora*. You must not give yourself that trouble again.”

“When the dog-cart comes along,” said she, “I hope you will drive out with me to Allt-nam-ba, and spend the evening with us.”

“You are very kind.”

“No, I am scheming,” she said. “The truth is the fishmonger at Inverness has disappointed me—no, no, no, Mrs. Bell, on the whole he has been very good ; but this time there is a mistake ; and do you think, Mr. Melville, if you were taking your rod you could get me a few trout out of the loch on the way home ? Is it too much to ask ?”

He glanced at the sky. “I think we

might manage it," said he, "though it is rather clear. There may be a breeze on the loch ; there generally is up there. But what we ought to do is to set out now, and walk it ; and let the trap pick us up at the loch. Can you walk so far ?"

" I should think so ! " said Yolande. " And be delighted too."

" Well, I will go and get my rod and basket. Then as we go along I can tell you the names of any plants you don't know, or answer any questions that may be puzzling you. Don't be afraid to ask. I like it. It helps to keep one's recollections clear. And I never laugh at ignorance ; it is the pretence of knowledge that is contemptible."

They did not, however, talk botany exclusively as they walked away from Gress, on this beautiful afternoon ; for he very speedily discovered that she knew far more about him and his family and his affairs than he could possibly have imagined.

" The days in Egypt were long," she explained, " and the Master used to tell me all about this neighbourhood until, when I came to it, everything seemed quite familiar."

“ You have been a great traveller,” he said.

“ Yes ; we have travelled about a good deal. And you ? ”

“ Not much. I think I am too lazy. The kind of travelling that I enjoy is to sit out in the garden of a summer evening, in an easy-chair, and to watch the sunset, and, perhaps, the moon slowly rising——”

“ But you said travelling,” she said.

“ Well, you are hurling along at a rate of 68,000 miles an hour ; isn’t that quick enough for anything ? ” he said, laughing.

“ It is a cheap way of travelling,” said she, with a smile.

“ That is why it suits me.”

“ But you don’t see much ? ”

“ No ! Not when you can watch the stars appear, one by one, over the hill-tops ? Don’t you think they are as interesting as the shops in the Palais Royal ? They are more mysterious, at all events. It does seem odd, you know, when you think of the numbers of human beings all over the world —the small, tiny creatures—sticking up their little tin tubes at the midnight sky, and making guesses at what the stars are made

of, and how they came to be there. It is a pathetic kind of thing to think about. I fancy I must try a 'Zulu' and a 'March Brown'?"

This startling *non sequitur* was caused by the fact that by this time they had reached the loch, and that he frequently thought aloud in this fashion, heedless of any incongruity, and heedless also of his companion. He sat down on a lump of granite, and took out his fly-book.

"Won't you walk on to the lodge, Miss Winterbourne?" said he. "I am going to drift down in the boat, and it will be slow work for you."

"I will wait on the bank," said she, "and watch. Do you not understand that I am seriously interested?"

"Then you will see whether I get any. It is a sport," he added, as he was selecting the flies, "that there is less to be said against than shooting, I imagine. I don't like the idea of shooting birds, especially after I have missed one or two. Birds are such harmless creatures. But a fish is different—the fish is making a murderous snap at an

innocent fly, or what he thinks to be a fly, when a little bit of steel catches him in the very act. It serves him right, from the moral point of view."

"But surely he is justified in trying to get his dinner," said she. "Just as you are doing now?"

"Well, I will put on a jay's wing also," said he, "and if they don't like one or other of those nice wholesome little dishes, we must try them with something else."

As it happened, however, the trout seemed disposed to rise to anything; for it was a good fishing afternoon—warm, with a light wind ruffling the surface of the loch. By the time the dog-cart came along he had got close on two dozen in his basket, averaging about three to the pound, so that a selection from them would do very well for dinner; and when he got ashore, and got into the trap, Yolande thanked him for them very prettily, while he, on the other hand, said that the obligation was all on his side.

"Why do you not come oftener, then?" she said, as they were driving along up the wide glen.

“I might be depriving some one else of the use of the boat,” he answered.

“No, no ; how can that be ?” she insisted. “They are all day up the hill. Why do you not come to the loch, every afternoon, and then come in and spend the evenings with us. Mrs. Bell says you do very wrong about your food, not having proper meals at proper times. Now we are always very punctual ; and if you came in and dined with us, it would teach you good habits.”

“You are too kind, Miss Winterbourne,” said he. “But please don’t think that I have forgotten the invitation you gave me the other night. I could not be so ungrateful as that.”

“And the use of remembering, if you do not act on it ?” said she—but she could not lecture the schoolmaster any further just then, for they had arrived at the wooden bridge, and she had to let the cob go very cautiously over that primitive structure.

After dinner that evening Mr. Winterbourne begged to be excused for a short time, as he had a letter to write that he wished posted at Whitebridge the same night. This was the letter :—

“ Allt-nam-ba, August 15.

“ DEAR SHORTLANDS—I am sending you a couple of brace of birds, and would send you more, but that I can see that my future son-in-law regards these bequests with great disfavour ; and as it is in my interest that he is trying to make as much as he can out of the shooting, I don’t like to interfere with his economical exertions. Prudence in a young man should be encouraged rather than checked. I hope you will not be later than the 20th. I shall be glad to have you here. The fact is, I have been torturing myself with doubts and questions, which may appear to you uncalled for. I hope they are uncalled for. Indeed, to all appearance, everything is going on well. Yolande is in the brightest spirits, and is delighted with the place ; and young Leslie seems very proud of her and affectionate. The only thing is whether I should not have put the whole facts of the case before him at the outset ; and whether I am not bound in honour to do so now, before the serious step of marriage is taken. I don’t know. I am afraid to do it ; and afraid of what might happen if I remain silent.

There is a young man here, a Mr. Melville, who was Leslie's tutor, and who remains his intimate associate and friend. He is very highly respected about here ; and, as I judge, seems to deserve the high opinion every one has of him. What I am thinking of now is the propriety of laying the whole affair before him, as Leslie's nearest friend. He knows the other members of the family also. I could trust him to give an honest opinion ; and if he, knowing all the circumstances of the case, and knowing Leslie, and the ways of the family, were to think it unnecessary to break silence, then I might be fairly justified in letting the thing be as it is. Do you not think so ? But you will answer this question in person—not later than the 20th, I hope.

“ For a long time I thought that, if only Yolande were married and settled quietly in the country, there would be no further need for anxiety ; but now I cannot keep from speculating on other possibilities, and wondering whether it would not be better to prevent any future ground of complaint, and consequent unhappiness, by telling the whole truth now. Surely that might be done

without letting Yolande know? Why should she ever know?

“If you can leave on the night of the 18th, you will reach Inverness next forenoon, and catch the 3 p.m. boat down the Caledonian Canal. Most likely you will find Yolande waiting for you at the pier; she likes driving. Our prospects for the 20th are fairly good; there is more cover for black game up those mountainous corries than I could have expected. We shoot all we find, as they don’t stop here through the winter. On the 12th we had sixty-eight brace grouse, one ptarmigan, one snipe, and a few mountain hares; on the 13th, seventy-one brace grouse, and also some hares; yesterday it was wet and wild, and we only went out for an hour or so in the afternoon—nine brace; to-day was fine, and we got sixty-two brace grouse, and one and a half brace ptarmigan. Young Leslie is about the best all-round shot I have ever seen; cool and certain. I think I get more nervous year by year; but then he is a capital hand at redeeming mistakes, and that gives one a little more confidence. A stag and three hinds passed

close by the lodge late last night—at least so the shepherds say.

“I know you won’t mind my asking you to bring some little trifle or other for Yolande, just to show that you were thinking of her. She will meet you at Foyers Pier.—Yours faithfully,

G. R. WINTERBOURNE.”

CHAPTER IV.

“IM WALD UND AUF DER HEIDE.”

NEXT morning there was a sudden call on Mr. Winterbourne to dismiss these fears and anxieties. The little community away up there in the solitude of the hills was suddenly thrown into violent commotion. A young gillie who had been wandering about had come running back to the bothy, declaring that he had seen a stag go into the wood just above the lodge ; and of course the news was immediately carried to the house ; and instantly the two gentlemen came out—Mr. Winterbourne eager and excited, the Master of Lynn not quite so sure of the truth of the report. Duncan, to tell the truth, was also inclined to doubt ; for this young lad had, until the previous year, been a deck-hand on board the *Dunara Castle*, and knew a great deal more about skarts and seagulls than about stags. Moreover, the shepherds had been

through the wood this same morning, with their dogs. However, it was determined, after much hurried consultation, not to miss the chance, if there was a chance. The day, in any case, threatened to turn out badly ; the clouds were coming closer and closer down ; to drive this wood would be a short and practicable undertaking that would carry them on conveniently to lunch time. And so it was finally arranged that Mr. Winterbourne should go away by himself to a station that he knew, commanding certain gullies that the stag, if there were a stag, would most likely make for ; while the Master would stay behind, and, after a calculated interval, go through the wood with Duncan and the beaters.

In the midst of all this Miss Yolande suddenly made her appearance in a short-skirted dress, thick boots, and deer-stalker's cap.

"What do *you* want?" her father said, abruptly, and with a stare.

"I am going with you," was her cool answer.

"Indeed you are not."

“Why not, then ?”

“Women going deer-stalking !” he exclaimed. “What next ?”

“Can I not be as quiet as any one ? Why should I not go with you ? I have climbed the hill many times, and I know very well where to hide, for Duncan showed me the place.”

“Go spin, you jade, go spin !” her father said, as he shouldered the heavy rifle, and set off on the long and weary struggle up the hill.

Yolande turned to the Master.

“Is he not unkind !” she said, in a crest-fallen way.

“If I were you,” said he, laughing, “I would go all the same.”

“Should I do any harm ? Is it possible that I could do any harm ?” she asked, quickly.

“Not a bit of it ! What harm could you do ? There is room for a dozen people to hide in that place ; and if you keep your head just a little bit above the edge, and keep perfectly still, you will see the whole performance in the gully below. If there is

a stag in the wood, and if I don't get a shot at him, he is almost sure to go up through the gullies. You won't scream I suppose? And don't move—if you move a finger he will see you. And don't tumble into too many moss-holes, Yolande, when you are crossing the moor. And don't break your ankles in a peat-hag. And don't topple over the edge when you get to the gullies."

"Do you think you will frighten me? No, I am going as soon as papa is out of sight."

"Oh, you can't go wrong," said he, good-naturedly. "The only thing is, when you get to the top of the hill, you might go on some three or four hundred yards before crossing the moor, so as to keep well back from the wood."

"Oh yes, certainly," said Yolande. "I understand very well."

Accordingly, some little time thereafter, she set out on her self-imposed task; and she was fully aware that it was a fairly arduous one. Even here at the outset it was pretty stiff work, for the hill rose sheer away from the little plateau on which the lodge stood,

and the ground was rugged in some parts, and a morass in others ; while there was an abundance of treacherous holes where the heather grew long among the rocks. But she had certain landmarks to guide her. At first there was a sheep track, then she made for two juniper bushes, then for certain conspicuous boulders ; then, higher up, she came on a rough and stony face where the climbing was pretty difficult ; then by the edge of a little hollow that had a tree or two in it ; and then, as she was now nearly at the top, and as there was a smooth boulder convenient, she thought she would sit down for a minute to regain her breath. Far below her the lodge and its dependencies looked like so many small toy houses ; she could see the tiny figures of human beings moving about ; in the perfect silence she could hear the whining of the dogs shut up in the kennel. Then one of those miniature figures waved something white ; she returned the signal. Then she rose and went on again ; she crossed a little burn ; she passed along the edge of some steep gullies leading away down to the Corrie-an-Eich—that is, the Corrie of

the Horses ; and finally, after some further climbing, she reached the broad, wide, open, undulating moorland, from which nothing was visible but a wilderness of bare and bleak mountain-tops, all as silent as the grave.

She had been up here twice or thrice before ; but she never came upon this scene of vast and voiceless desolation without being struck by a sort of terror. It seemed away out of the world. And on this morning a deeper gloom than usual hung over it ; the clouds were low and heavy ; there was a brooding stillness in the air. She was glad that some one had preceded her ; the solitude of this place was terrible.

And now as she set out to cross the wild moorland she discovered that that was a much more serious undertaking than when she had a friendly hand to lend her assistance from time to time. This wide plain of moss and bog and heather was intersected by a succession of peat-hags, the oozy black soil of which was much more easy to slide down into than to clamber out of. The Master of Lynn had taught her how to cross these hags : one step down, then a spring across, then her

right hand grasped by his right hand, then her elbow caught by his left hand, and she stood secure on the top of the other bank. But now, as she scrambled down the one side, so she had to scramble up the other, generally laying hold of a bunch of heather to help her ; and as she was anxious not to lose her way, she made a straight course across this desert waste, and did not turn aside for drier or smoother ground as one better acquainted with the moor might have done. However, she struggled on bravely. The first chill struck by that picture of desolation had gone. She was thinking more of the deer now. She hoped she would be up in time. She hoped her father would get a chance. And of course she made perfectly certain that if he did get a chance he would kill the stag ; and then there would be a joyful procession back to the lodge ; and a rare to-do among the servants and the gillies, with perhaps a dance in the evening to the skirl of Duncan's pipes.

All at once a cold wind began to blow, and about a minute thereafter she had no more idea of where she was than if she had

been in the middle of the Atlantic. The whole world had been suddenly shut out from her; all she could see was a yard or two, either way, of the wet moss and heather. This gray cloud that had come along was raw to the throat and to the eyes, but it did not deposit much moisture on her clothes; its chief effect was the bewilderment of not seeing anything. And yet she thought she ought to go on. Perhaps she might get out of it. Perhaps the wind would carry it off. And so she kept on as straight as she could guess, but with much more caution; for at any moment she might fall into one of the deep holes worn by the streams in the peat, or into one of the moss-holes where the vegetation was so treacherously green.

But as she went on and on, and could find nothing that she could recognise, she grew afraid. Moreover there was a roaring of a waterfall somewhere, which seemed to her louder than anything she had heard about there before. She began to wonder how far she had come, and to fear that in the mist she had lost her direction, and might be in the immediate neighbourhood of some

dangerous precipice. And then—as she was looking all round her helplessly—her heart stood still with fright. There—away in that vague pall that encompassed her—stood the shadow, the ghost of an animal,—a large, visionary thing, motionless and noiseless, at a distance that she could not compute. And now she felt sure that that was the stag they were in search of; and, strangely enough, her agony of fear was not that she might by accident be shot through being in the neighbourhood of the deer, but that she might by some movement on her part scare it away. She stood motionless, her heart now beating with excitement, her eyes fixed on this faint shade away in there, in the gray. It did not move; she did not move. She kept her hands clenched by her side, so that she should not tremble. She dared not even sink into the heather and try to hide there. But the next moment she had almost screamed, for there was a hurried, rushing noise behind her, and as she (in spite of herself) wheeled round to face this new danger, a troop of phantoms went flying by—awful things they appeared to be until, just as they passed her,

she recognised them to be humble and familiar sheep. Moreover, when she saw that other animal out there disappear along with them —the whole of them looming large and mysterious in this cloud-world—she made sure that that had been a sheep also ; and she breathed more freely. Must not these animals have been disturbed by her father ? Ought she not to make back in the direction from which they had come ? To go any farther forward she scarcely dared ; the roar of water seemed perilously near.

As she thus stood, bewildered, uncertain, and full of a nameless dread, she saw before her a strange thing—a thing that added amazement to her terror—a belt of white, like a waterfall, that seemed to connect earth and sky. It was at an unknown distance, but it appeared to be perfectly vertical ; and she knew that no such stupendous waterfall had she either seen before or heard of. That, then,—that white water—was the cause of the roaring noise. And then she bethought her of a saying of Archie Leslie, that tales were told of people having gone into this wilderness and never having been heard of again ;

but that there was one sure way of escape for any one who got astray—to follow any one of the streams. That, he had said, must sooner or later lead you down to Allt-nam-ba. But when she thought of going away over to that white torrent, and seeking to follow its course down through chasm after chasm, she shuddered. For one who knew the country intimately—for a man who could jump from boulder to boulder, and swing himself from bush to bush—it might be possible; for her it was impossible. Nor was there the slightest use in her trying to go back the way she came. She had lost all sense of direction; there was nothing to give her a clue; she was absolutely helpless.

But fortunately she had the good sense to stand still and to consider her position with such calmness as she could muster; and that took time; and during this time, insensibly to herself, the clouds around were growing thinner. Then she noticed that the upper part of that awe-inspiring torrent had receded very considerably—that the white line was no longer vertical, but seemed to stretch back into the distance. Then the moorland visible

around her began to grow more extended. Here and there faint visions of hills appeared. And then a flood of joyful recognition broke over her. That awful torrent was nothing but the familiar Allt-cam-bân,¹ its brawling white stream not vertical at all, but merely winding down from the far heights of the hills. She had come too far, certainly; but now she knew that the gullies she was in search of were just behind her; and that her father's hiding-place was not more than three hundred yards distant. The cloud that had encompassed her was now trailing along the face of the hill opposite her; the gloomy landscape was clear in all its features. With a light heart she tripped along, over heather, across hags, through sopping moss, until behind a little barricade which Nature had formed at the summit of a precipice overlooking certain ravines—a little box, as it were, that looked as if it had been dug out for the very purpose of deer-slaying—she found her father quietly standing, and cautiously peering over the ledge.

When he heard her stealthy approach, he

¹ The White Winding Water.

quickly turned ; then he motioned her to stoop down and come to him. This she did very cautiously and breathlessly, and presently she was standing beside him, on a spot which enabled her to look down into the gullies beneath. These certainly formed a most admirable deer-trap, if ever there was one. The place consisted of a series of little hills or lumps, probably not more than 150 feet in height, with sheer smooth slopes, here and there lightly wooded, but mostly covered with heather. The gullies between those lumps, again, came to a point in a ravine just underneath where Yolande was standing ; so that, whichever way the deer came, they were almost certain to make up the steep face just opposite this station, and so give the rifleman an excellent chance. Yolande took out her housekeeper's note-book, and wrote on the fly-leaf :

“Have you seen anything?”

He shook his head ; and motioned to her to put the book away. It was not a time for trifling. If there were a stag in the unseen woods beyond, it might make its sudden appearance in this silent little ravine at any

moment, and might make for the top by some quite unexpected track. He kept his eyes on the watch all along the gullies; but his head was motionless. Yolande, too, was eager and anxious—but only for a while. As time passed she grew listless. This solitude seemed always to have been a solitude. There was no sign of life in it. Doubtless the young lad had been deceived. And then she grew to thinking of the strange sight she saw in the mist, when the waters of the Allt-cam-bân seemed to be one foaming, white, vertical torrent.

Then a shock came to her eyes: a living thing suddenly appeared in that empty solitude; and at once she clenched her hands. She knew what was expected of her. She remained rigid as a stone; she would not even raise her head to see if her father saw. She kept her eyes on this startling feature in the landscape; she held her breath; she was mainly conscious of a dim fear that this animal that was coming over that hillock at such a speed was not a deer at all but a fox. It was of a light reddish-brown colour. Then it had not come up any of the gullies,

as she had been told to expect ; it had come right over the top of the little hill, with a long, sinuous stride ; and now it was descending again into the ravine. But here she saw it was a deer. Once out of the long heather, and coming nearer, too, it was clear that this was a deer. But surely small ? Where were the great horns ? Or was it a hind ? She knew rather than saw that her father twice aimed his rifle at this animal, whatever it was, as it sped across an open space at the bottom of the ravine. Of course all this happened in a few seconds ; and she had just begun to think that the animal had horns, and was a roebuck, when the lithe, red, sinuous, silent object disappeared altogether behind a ridge. Still she did not move. She did not express disappointment. She would not turn her head.

Then she knew that her father had quickly passed her and jumped on to a clump of heather whence he could get a better view. She followed. The next thing she saw, clear against the sky, and not more than a hundred and twenty yards off, was the head of a deer, the horns thrown back, the nostrils high in

the air. The same instant her father fired; and that strange object (which very much frightened her) disappeared. She saw her father pause for a second to put a fresh cartridge in his rifle; and then away he hurried to the place where the deer had passed; and so she thought she might now safely follow. She found her father searching all about, but more particularly studying the peat-hags.

"I do believe I hit him," he said (and there was considerable vexation in his tone). "Look about, Yolande. He must have crossed the peat somewhere. If he is wounded, he may not have gone far. It was only a roebuck—still—such a chance! Confound it, I believe I've missed him clean!"

He was evidently grievously mortified; and she was sorry; for she knew he would worry about it afterwards; smaller trifles than that made him fidget. But all their searching was in vain. The peat-hags here were narrow; a frightened deer would clear them.

"If he is wounded, papa, Duncan and the dogs will go after him."

"Oh no," said he moodily, "I believe I

missed him clean. If he had been hit, he couldn't have got away so fast. Of course, it was only a buck—still—”

“But, papa, it was a most difficult shot! I never saw any creature go at such a pace; and you only saw him for a moment!”

“Yes, and for that moment he looked as big as a cow, against the sky. Nobody but an idiot could have missed the thing!”

“Oh, you need not try to make me believe you are a bad shot,” said she, proudly. “No. Every one knows better than that. I know what Mr. Leslie tells me. And I suppose the very best shot in the world misses sometimes?”

“Well, there is no use waiting here,” said he. “Of course there was no stag. The stag that idiot of a boy saw was this roebuck. If there were a stag, the noise of the shot must have driven him off. Why the mischief I did not fire when he was crossing the gully I don't understand!—I had my rifle up twice—”

“Papa,” said she, suddenly, “what is that?”

She was looking away down into the

ravine beneath them—at a dusky red object that was lying in a patch of green breckan. He followed the direction of her eyes.

"Why, surely—yes, it is, Yolande—that is the buck—he must have fallen backwards and rolled right down to the bottom—"

"And you said you were such a bad shot, papa!"

"Oh, that is no such prize," he said (but he spoke a good deal more cheerfully); "what I wonder is whether the poor beast is dead—I suppose he must be—"

"There they come—there they come—look!" she said; and she was far more excited and delighted than he was. "There is the red gillie at the top, and Duncan coming along by the hollow—and there is Archie—"

She took out her handkerchief, and waved it in the air.

"Don't, Yolande!" said he. "They'll think we've got a stag!"

"We've got all the stag there was to get!" said she, proudly. "And you said you were not a good shot—to shoot a roebuck running at such a pace!"

“You are the most thorough-going flatterer, Yolande!” he said, laughing (but he was very much pleased all the same). “Why, he wasn’t going at all just at the crest—he stopped to sniff the air——”

“But you could only have seen him for the fiftieth part of a second: isn’t that the same as running?”

At this moment a voice was heard from below, where a little group of figures had collected round the buck. It was the Master of Lynn who was looking up to them.

“A very fine head, sir!” he called.

“There, didn’t I tell you?” she said, proudly—though she had never told him anything of the kind. And then in the excitement of the moment she forgot she had never revealed to her father that little arrangement about the whisky that the Master had suggested to her.

“Duncan,” she called down to them.

“Yes, Miss?”

“When you go back home, you will let the beaters have a glass of whisky each.”

“Very well, Miss,” he called back; and then he proceeded with the slinging of the

buck round the shoulders of the red-headed gillie.

"Archie," she called again.

"Yes?"

"If you are back at the lodge first, wait for us. We shall be there in time for lunch."

"All right."

She was very proud and pleased as they trudged away home again over the wild moorland. For her part she could see no difference between a roedeer and a red-deer, except that the former (as she declared) was a great deal pleasanter to eat, as she hoped she would be able to show them. And was it not a far more difficult thing to hit a deer of the size of a roebuck than to hit a stag as tall as a horse?

"Flatterer—flatterer!" he said; but he was mightily well pleased all the same; and indeed to see Yolande gay and cheerful like this was of itself quite enough for him; so that for the time he forgot all his anxieties and fears.

CHAPTER V.

A CONFIDANT.

ONE evening John Shortlands and Jack Melville were together standing at the door of the lodge, looking down the glen at the very singular spectacle there presented. The day had been dull and overclouded, and seemed about to sink into an equally gloomy evening, when suddenly, at sunset, the western heavens broke into a flame of red ; and all at once the stream flowing down through the long valley became one sheet of vivid pink fire, only broken here and there by the big blocks of granite in its channel, which remained of a pale and ghostly gray. It was a very curious effect ; for it was the boulders (getting their colour from the overclouded zenith) that seemed faint and shadowy and phantasmal ; while the water was solid, shining, fire-red, and bewildering to the eyes.

The big, burly M.P., however, did not

seem wholly occupied with this transfiguration of the heavens. He looked vexed, perturbed, impatient.

“Mr. Melville,” he said, abruptly, in his broad Northumbrian intonation, “will you walk down the glen for a bit?”

“Yes; but we should fetch Miss Winterbourne to show her the skies on fire.”

“No; it’s about her I want to speak to you. Come along.”

“About her?” he repeated, with the large clear gray eyes showing some astonishment.

“Or, rather,” said his companion, when they had got as far as the bridge, “about her father. Winterbourne is an old friend of mine, and I won’t just call him an ass; but the way he is going on at present, shilly shallying, frightened to say this, frightened to say that, is enough to worry a far stronger man than he is into his grave. Well, if he won’t speak, I will. Dang it, I hate mystery! My motto is—Out with it! And he would never have got into this precious mess if he had taken my advice all through.”

Melville was surprised; but he did not

interrupt. John Shortlands seemed a trifle angry.

“The immediate trouble with him is this: Ought he, or ought he not, to confide certain matters to you as a friend of young Leslie? Well, I am going to take that into my own hand. I am going to tell you the whole story—and a miserable business it is.”

“Do you think that is wise?” the younger man said, calmly. “If there is anything disagreeable, shouldn’t the knowledge of it be kept to as few people as possible? I would rather have my illusions left. The Winterbournes have been kind to me since they came here; and it has been delightful to me to look at these two—the spectacle of father and daughter——”

“Oh, but I have nothing to say against either of them—God forbid!—except that Winterbourne has been a confounded ass, as it seems to me; or perhaps I should say as it used to seem to me. Well, now, I suppose you know that your friend Leslie and Yolande are engaged?”

“I have understood as much.”

"But did he not tell ye?" said Shortlands, with a stare.

"Well, yes," the other said, in rather a cold way. "But we did not have much talk about it. Archie Leslie is a very fine fellow; but he and I don't always agree in our ways of looking at things."

"Then, at all events, in order to disagree you must know what his way of looking at things is; and that is just the point I'm coming to," said Shortlands, in his blunt, dogmatic kind of way. "Just this, that Yolande Winterbourne has been brought up all her life to believe that her mother died when she was a child; whereas the mother is not dead, but very much alive—worse luck; and the point is whether he ought to be told; and whether he is a sensible sort of a chap, who would make no fuss about it, and who would see that it could not matter much to him; and, above all, whether he would consent to keep this knowledge back from Yolande, who would only be shocked and horrified by it. Do ye understand? I think I have put it plain—that is, from Winterbourne's point of view—"

“But surely,” exclaimed Melville, with wide-open eyes,—“surely the best thing—surely the natural thing—would be to tell the girl herself, first of all!”

“Man alive, Winterbourne would rather cut his throat! Don’t you see that his affection for the girl is quite extraordinary? it is the sole passion of his life; a needle-scratch on Yolande’s finger is like a knife to his heart. I assure you the misery he has endured in keeping this secret is beyond anything I can tell you; and I do believe he would go through the whole thing again just that Yolande’s mind should be free, happy, and careless. Mind you, it was not done through any advice of mine. No; nor was it Winterbourne either who began it; it was his sister. The child was given to her charge when she was about two or three years old, I fancy. Then they were living in Lincolnshire; afterwards they went to France; and the aunt died there. It was she who brought Yolande up to believe her mother dead; and then Winterbourne put off and put off telling her—although twenty times I remonstrated with him—until he found it quite impossible.

He couldn't do it. Sometimes when I look at her now, I scarcely wonder. She seems such a radiant kind of a creature that I doubt whether I could bring myself to tell her that story—no, I could not—dang it, I could not! And even when I was having rows with Winterbourne, and telling him what an ass he was, and telling him that the torture he was going through was quite unnecessary, why, man, I thought there was something fine in it too : and again and again I have watched him when he would sit and look at Yolande and listen to all her nonsense, and have seen his face just filled with pleasure to see her so happy and careless, and then I thought he had his moments of recompense also. When he goes about with her he forgets all that worry—thank goodness for that ; and certainly she is high-spirited enough for anything ; you would think she had never known a care or a trouble in all her existence ; and I suppose that's about the truth."

John Shortlands had grown quite eloquent about Yolande—although, indeed, he was not much of an orator in the House ; and

his companion listened in silence—in a profound reverie, in fact. At last he said, slowly—

“I suppose there is no necessity that I should know why the girl has been kept in ignorance of her mother’s existence?”

“Oh, I will tell you the story—miserable as it is. Well, it is a sad story, too: for you cannot imagine a pleasanter creature than that was when Winterbourne married her. He was older than she was, but not much; he looks a good deal older now than he really is—those years have told on him. It was neuralgia that began it; she suffered horribly. Then some idiot advised her to drink port wine—I suppose the very worst thing she could have tried, for if it is bad for gout, it must be bad for rheumatism and neuralgia, and such things; at least I should think so. However, it soothed her at first, I suppose; and no doubt she took refuge in it whenever a bad attack came on. But, mind you, it was not that that played the mischief with her. She herself became aware that she was being tempted to take too much; for quite suddenly she went to her husband, who had

suspected nothing of the kind, told him frankly that the habit was growing on her, and declared her resolution to break the thing off at once. She did that. I firmly believe she did keep her resolution to the letter. But then the poor wretch had worse and worse agony to bear ; and then it was that somebody or other—it wasn't Winterbourne, and he knew nothing about it—recommended her to try one of those patent medicines they make up from opium or morphia. I dare-say it was harmless at first. No doubt she began with small doses. But it seems that those drugs are twenty times worse than brandy or whisky in destroying the power of the will ; and so I suppose the poor creature went on and on, increasing the doses and destroying her brain at the same time, until in the end she was simply a hopeless drunkard. It seems miraculous how women can go on destroying themselves with those infernal drugs without being found out. I don't know whether Winterbourne would ever have found it out ; for he is an indulgent sort of chap, and he was very fond of her ; but one night there was a scene at dinner. Then he dis-

covered the whole thing. The child was sent away, for fear of further scenes ; and this so terrified the mother that she made the most solemn promises never to touch the poison again. But by this time—here is the mischief of those infernal things—her power of self-control had gone. Man alive, I can't tell you what Winterbourne had to go through. His patience with her was super-human ; and always the promise held out to her was that Yolande was to be restored to her ; and sometimes she succeeded so well that every one was hopeful, and she seemed to have quite recovered. Then again there would be another relapse ; and a wild struggle to conceal it from the friends of the family ; and all the rest of it. What a life he has led all those years—trying to get her to live in some safe retreat or other ; and then suddenly finding that she had broken out again, and gone to some people, Romneys or Romfords, the name is, who have a most pernicious influence over her, and can do anything with her when she is in that semi-maudlin state. Of course they use her to extort money from Winterbourne ; and she has drugged half

her wits away ; and it is easy for them to persuade her that she has been ill-treated about Yolande. Then she will go down to the House, or hunt him out at his lodgings—oh, I assure you I can't tell you what has been going on all these years. There is only one fortunate thing—that the Romfords are not aware of the terror in which he lives of Yolande getting to know the truth, or else they would put the screw on a good deal more forcibly, I reckon. As for her, poor woman, she has no idea of asking for money for herself—in fact, she has plenty. It is not a question of money with Winterbourne. His dread is that she might stumble on them accidentally, and Yolande have to be told. That is why he has consented to her remaining all these years in France, though his only delight is in her society. That is why he won't let her live in London, but would rather put himself to any inconvenience by her living elsewhere. That is why he looks forward with very fair composure to a separation ; Yolande living in peace and quiet in this neighbourhood here ; and he left in London to take his chance of a stone being

thrown through his window at any hour of the day or night!"

"But that terrorism is perfectly frightful!—"

"How are you to avoid it?" said Shortlands, coolly. "There is the one way, of course. There is the heroic remedy. Tell Yolande the whole story; and then, the next time the stone is thrown, summon the police, give the woman in charge, bind her over in recognisances, and have all your names in the next day's paper. Some men could do that. Winterbourne couldn't; he hasn't the nerve."

The answer to that was a strange one. It was a remark, or rather an exclamation, that Melville seemed to make almost to himself.

"My God, not one of them appears to see what ought to be done!"

But the remark was overheard.

"What would you do, then?"

"I?" said Melville—and John Shortlands did not observe that the refined, intellectual face of his companion grew a shade paler as he spoke: "I? I would go straight to the girl herself, and I would say: 'That is the

condition in which your mother is: go and save her'!"

"Then let me tell you this, Mr. Melville," said Shortlands, quite as warmly, "rather than bring such shame and horror and suffering on his daughter, George Winterbourne would cut off his fingers one by one. Why, man, you don't understand what that girl is to him—his very life! Besides, everything has been tried. You don't suppose the mother would have been allowed to sink to that state without every human effort being made to save her; and always Yolande herself held out to her as the future reward. Now we must be getting back, I think. But I wish you would think over what I have told you; and let Winterbourne have your opinion as to whether all this should be declared to your friend Leslie. Winterbourne's first idea was that, if Yolande were married and settled in the country—especially in such a remote neighbourhood as this—there would be no need to tell even her husband about it. It could not concern them. But now he is worrying himself to death about other possibilities. Supposing something disagreeable

were to happen in London, and the family name get into the paper, then Yolande's husband might turn round and ask why it had been concealed from him. That might be unpleasant, you know. If he were not considerate, he might put the blame on her. The fact is, Winterbourne has had his nervous system so pulled to pieces by all this fear and secrecy and anxiety that he exaggerates things tremendously and keeps speculating on dangers never likely to occur. Why, he can't shoot half as well as he used to ; he is always imagining something is going to happen ; and he does not take half his chances just for fear of missing and being mortified after. He has not had a pleasant time of it these many years."

They turned now, and leisurely made their way back to the lodge. The red sunset still flared up the glen ; but now it was behind them ; and it was a soft warm colour that they saw spreading over the heather slopes of the hills, and the wooded corries, and the little plateau between the convergent streams.

" May I ask your own opinion, Mr. Shortlands ?" said Melville, after a time, " as to

whether this thing should be kept back from Leslie?"

"Well, I should say that would depend pretty much on his character," was the answer; "and as to that I know very little. My own inclination would be for having a frank disclosure all round; but still I see what Winterbourne has to say for himself; and I cannot imagine how the existence of this poor woman could concern either your friend Leslie or his wife. Probably they would never hear a word of her. She can't live long. She must have destroyed her constitution completely—poor wretch, one can't help pitying her; and at the same time, you know, it would be a great relief if she were dead, both to herself and her relatives. Of course, if Mr. Leslie were a finical sort of person—I am talking in absolute confidence you know, and in ignorance as well—he might make some objection; but if he were a man with a good sound base of character, he would say, 'Well, what does that matter to me?' and he would have some consideration for what Winterbourne has gone through in order to keep this trouble concealed from the girl, and

would himself be as willing to conceal it from her."

"Don't you think," said Melville, after a minute's pause, "that the mere fact that he might make some objection is a reason why he should be informed at once?"

"Is he an ass?" said John Shortlands, bluntly. "Is he a worrying sort of creature?"

"Oh, not at all. He is remarkably sensible—very sensible. He will take a perfectly calm view of the situation; you may depend on that."

"Other things being equal, I am for his being told—most distinctly. If he has common sense, there need be no trouble. On the other hand, you know, if you should think we are making a fuss where none is necessary, I have a notion that Winterbourne would be satisfied by your judgment, as an intimate friend of Leslie's."

"But that is putting rather a serious responsibility on me. Supposing it is decided to say nothing about the matter, then I should be in the awkward position of knowing something affecting Leslie's domestic affairs of which he would be ignorant."

“Undoubtedly. I quite see that. But if you are afraid of accepting the responsibility, there’s an easy way out of it. I will go and tell him myself, and have it over. I have already broken away from Winterbourne’s shilly-shallying by speaking to you ; he would never have done it ; and he is worrying himself into his grave. He is a timid and sensitive fellow ; he now thinks he should have told the Master, as he calls him, when he first proposed for Yolande ; and perhaps it might have been better to do so ; but I can see how he was probably well inclined to the match for various reasons, and anxious not to put any imaginary stumbling-block in the way. But now, if you were to go to him and say, ‘Well, I have heard the whole story. It can’t concern either Yolande or her future husband. Forget the whole thing ; and don’t worry any more about it,’ I do believe he would recover his peace of mind, for he has confidence in your judgment.”

“It would be rather a serious thing.”

“I know it.”

“I must take time to turn the matter over.”

“Oh, certainly.”

They had now reached the bridge, and, happening to look up, they saw that Yolande had come to the door of the lodge, and was standing there, and waving a handkerchief to them as a sign to make haste. And what a pretty picture she made as she stood there—the warm light from the west aglow upon the tall, English-looking figure clad in a light-hued costume, and giving colour to the fair, freckled face, and the ruddy-gold aureole of her hair. Melville’s eyes lighted up with pleasure at the very sight of her; it was but natural—she was like a vision.

“Ah,” said she, shaking her finger at them as they went up the path, “you are wicked men. Seven minutes late already; and if the two-pounder that Mr. Melville brought for me has fallen all to pieces you must have yourselves to blame—that is true.”

“I wish, Miss Winterbourne,” said Jack Melville, “that some noble creature would give me a day’s salmon-fishing. Then I could bring you something better than loch trout.”

“Oh no,” she answered, imperiously, “I

will not have anything said against the loch trout. No; I am sure there is nothing ever so good as what you get from your own place —nothing. Papa says that never, never did he have such cutlets as those from the roe-deer that he shot last week."

"I can tell you, Miss Yolande," said John Shortlands, "that others beside your father fully appreciated those cutlets. The whole thing depends on whether you have got a smart young housekeeper; and I have it in my head now that I am going to spend the rest of my days at Allt-nam-ba; and I will engage you—on your own terms—name them—you shall have the money down—and then I will have Duncan compose a march for me—why should it be always *Melville's Welcome Home?*"

"But you are also to have the *Barren Rocks of Aden* to-night," said she, brightly. "I told Duncan it was your favourite. Now, come along—come along—oh, dear me! it is ten minutes late!"

Jack Melville was rather silent that night at dinner. And always—when he could make perfectly certain that her eyes were cast

down—or turned in the direction of John Shortlands or of her father—he was studying Yolande's face ; and sometimes he would recall the phrase that Mrs. Bell had used on the first occasion she had seen this young lady, or rather immediately after parting with her—“She's a braw lass, that ; I fear she will make some man's heart sore”—and then again he kept wondering and speculating as to what possible strength of will and womanly character there might lie behind those fair, soft, girlish features.

CHAPTER VI.

A PEACEMAKER.

PRETTY Mrs. Graham was standing in her room at Inverstroy, ready to go out; her husband was in the adjacent dressing-room, engaged in the operation of shaving.

“You need not be afraid, Jim,” said the young matron. “Everything has been arranged. Everything will go quite right till I come back. And Archie is to meet me at Fort Augustus, so that the ponies won’t have the long pull up Glendoe.”

“Why can’t he manage his own affairs?” the stout warrior grumbled.

“Aunt Colquhoun isn’t easy to get on with,” she said. “And I am beginning to feel anxious. What would you say to his getting spiteful, and running away with *Shena Vän*?”

“Stuff!”

“Oh, I don’t know. If I chose I could

show you something I cut out of the *Inverness Courier* about three years ago. Well, I will show it to you."

She went to a drawer in her wardrobe, and hunted about for a time until she found the newspaper cutting, which she brought back and put before him on the dressing-table. This was what he took up and read :—

FOR SHENA'S NEW YEAR'S DAY MORNING.

*"Her eyes are dark and soft and blue,
She's light-stepped as the roe;
O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!"*

*I wish that I were by the rills
Above the Allt-cam-bân;
And wandering with me o'er the hills,
My own dear Shena Vân.*

*Far other sights and scenes I view :
The year goes out in snow;
O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!"*

"Well," said he, contemptuously throwing down again the piece of paper, "you don't suppose Archie wrote that rubbish? That isn't his line."

"It's a line that most lads take at a certain age," said Mrs. Graham, shrewdly.

“More likely some moon-struck ploughboy!” her husband interjected; for, indeed, he did not seem to think much of those verses, which she regarded with some fondness.

“I am afraid,” said she, looking at the lines, “that the ploughboys in this part of the world don’t know quite as much English as all that comes to. And how many people do you think now, Jim, have ever heard of the Allt-cam-bân? And then *Shena*—how many people have ever heard of Janet Stewart’s nickname? There is another thing. Those verses appeared when Archie was at Edinburgh; and of course he knew very well that, although he was not allowed to write to her, the *Inverness Courier* would make its way into the manse. I think they are very pretty.

‘*O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where’er you go!*’

That is the worst of marrying an old man. *They* never write poetry about you.”

“You call that poetry!” he said.

“Well, good-bye, Jim. I will tell MacKenzie when he is to meet me at Fort Augustus.”

“Bring back Yolande Winterbourne with you,” said Colonel Graham, who had now about finished his toilette.

“How can I, without asking her father? And there wouldn’t be room.”

“I don’t want her father. I want her. There is no fun in having a whole houseful of married women.”

“I quite agree with you. And who wanted them? Certainly not I. There is only one thing more absurd than having nothing but married women in the house, and that is having nothing but married men. But you have had a warning this year, Jim. Everybody acknowledges that there never was such bad shooting. I hope another year you will get one or two younger men who know what shooting is, and who can climb. Well, good-bye, Jim.” And presently pretty Mrs. Graham was seated in a light little waggonette of polished oak, the reins in her hand, and a pair of stout little ponies trotting away down through the wooded and winding deeps of Glenstroy.

It was a long drive to Fort Augustus; and although from time to time a refrain went echoing through her head—

*“O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!”*

and apparently connecting itself somehow with the pattering of the horses' feet on the road, still her brain was far from being idle. This expedition was entirely of her own proper choice and motion. In truth she had been alarmed by the very fact that the Master of Lynn had ceased to wish for her interference. He had refused to urge his case further. If the people at Lynn Towers were blind to their own interests they might remain so. He was not going to argue and stir up domestic dissension. He would not allow Yolande's name to be drawn into any such brawl ; and certainly he would not suffer any discussion of herself or her merits. All this Mrs. Graham gathered vaguely from one or two letters ; and, as she considered the situation as being obviously dangerous, she had, at great inconvenience to herself, left her house full of guests, and was now about to see what could be done at Lynn Towers.

When she reached Fort Augustus Archie Leslie was waiting for her there at the hotel ; and she found him in the same mood. He

did not wish to have anything said about the matter. He professed to be indifferent. He assumed that his sister had come on an ordinary filial visit, and he had luncheon ready for her. He said she was looking prettier than ever, and was anxious to know whether they had done well with the shooting at Inverstroy.

“Now look here, Archie,” said she, when the waiter had finally left the room. “Let us understand each other. You know what I have come about—at some trouble to myself. There is no use in your making the thing more difficult than needs be. And you know perfectly well that matters cannot remain as they are.”

“I know perfectly well that matters cannot remain as they are,” he repeated, with some touch of irony; “for this excellent reason, that in the course of time the Winterbournes will be going south, and that as Mr. Winterbourne has never been within the doors of Lynn Towers, and isn’t likely to be, he will draw his own conclusions. Probably he has done so already. I haven’t seen much of him since his friend Shortlands came. Very

likely he already understands why our family have taken no notice of them; and I know he is too proud a man to allow his daughter to be mixed up in any domestic squabble. They will go south. That will be—Good-bye."

"But, my dear Master," his sister protested, "if you would only show a little conciliation——"

"What!" he said, indignantly. "Do you think I am going to beg for an invitation for Mr. Winterbourne? Do you expect me to go and ask that Yolande should be received at Lynn Towers? I think not! I don't quite see my way to that yet!"

"You needn't be angry——"

"But it is so absurd," he exclaimed. "What have Winterbourne's politics to do with Yolande? Supposing he wanted to blow up the House of Lords with dynamite, what has that got to do with her? It is Burke's *Peerage* that is at the bottom of all this nonsense. If every blessed copy of that book were burned out of the world, they wouldn't have another word to say. It is the fear of seeing 'daughter of Mr. Winter-

bourne, M.P. for Slagpool,' that is setting them crazy. That comes of living out of the world—that comes of being toadied by gillies and town councillors. But I am not going to trouble about it," said he, with a sudden air of indifference. "I am not going to make a fuss. They can go their way; I can go mine."

"Yes, and the Winterbournes will go theirs," said his sister, sharply.

"Very well."

"But it is not very well—it is very ill. Come now, Archie, be reasonable. You know the trouble I had before I married Jim; it was got over by a little patience and discretion."

"Oh, if you think I am going to cringe and crawl about for their consent, you are quite mistaken. I would not put Yolande Winterbourne into such a position. Why," said he, with some sense of injury in his tone, "I like the way they talk—as if they were asked to sacrifice something! If there is any sacrifice in the case it seems to me that I am making it, not they. I am doing what I think best for Lynn, that has always

been starved for want of money. Very well ; if they don't like it they can leave it alone. I am not going to beg for any favour in the matter."

"It might be as well not to talk of any sacrifice," said his sister, quietly, and yet with some significance. "I don't think there will be much sacrifice. Well, now I'm ready, Archie ; what have you brought—the dog-cart ?"

"Yes."

Shortly thereafter they set out for Lynn ; and they did not resume this conversation ; for as they had to climb the steep road leading into Glendoe, the Master got down and walked, leaving the reins to his sister. They passed through the deep woods, and up and out on to the open heights. They skirted the solitary little lake that lies in a mountain-cup up there. And then, in due time, they came in sight of the inland country —a broad and variegated plain, with here and there a farmhouse or village.

They came in sight of something else, too —the figure of a young woman who was coming along the road. Mrs. Graham's eyes

were fixed on that solitary person for some time before she exclaimed—

“Archie, do you see who that is?”

“Of course I do,” said he, not with the best grace.

“It is she, isn’t it?” she said, eagerly.

“I suppose you can see that for yourself,” was the answer.

“Perhaps it isn’t the first time to-day that you have met her?” said she, looking up with a quick scrutiny.

“If you want to know, I have not set eyes on her since last Christmas. She has been living in Inverness.”

He pulled up. This young lady whom they now stopped to speak to was a good-looking girl of about twenty, with light brown hair and very dark blue eyes. There was some firmness and shrewdness of character in the face, despite the shyness that was also very visible there. For the rest, she was neatly dressed—in something of a town style.

She merely nodded to the Master, who took off his hat; but, as she was on Mrs. Graham’s side of the dog-cart, she shook

hands with that lady ; and her bright, fresh-coloured, upturned face had something of diffidence or self-consciousness in it.

“Oh, how do you do, Miss Stewart ! It is such a long time since I have seen you,” said Mrs. Graham.

“You do not come often to Lynn now, Mrs. Graham,” said Miss Stewart, with just a touch of a very pretty accent, “and I have been living in Inverness.”

“Oh, indeed. And how are the people at the manse ?”

They chatted in the ordinary fashion for a few minutes ; and then the Master of Lynn drove on again—in silence. Mrs. Graham ventured to repeat—apparently to herself, though he must have overheard—

“*And wandering with me o'er the hills
My own dear Shena Van ;*”

but if he did overhear, he took no notice ; and certainly he betrayed neither confusion nor annoyance. Perhaps the verses were not his, after all ? The minister’s daughter was the belle of those parts ; she had had many admirers ; and the *Inverness Courier* was the natural medium for the expression of their

woes. Still, Mrs. Graham asked herself how many people in the world knew of the existence of the Allt-cam-bân, far away in the solitudes over Allt-nam-ba.

Mrs. Graham, as it turned out, had a terrible time of it with her father. This short, thickset man with the voluminous brown and gray beard, shaggy eyebrows, and bald head surmounted by a black velvet skull-cap, was simply furious; and so far from being affected in any degree by his daughter's blandishments, he seemed inclined to direct his wrath upon her as the chief aider and abettor of her brother's high treason. Nor was his lordship's language marked by much gentleness or reticence.

"The idea," he exclaimed, "that Dochfour, and Lochiel, and Culloden, and the rest of them, might have to rub shoulders with a low, scoundrelly Radical! the mere chance of such a thing happening is monstrous!"

"I beg to remind you, papa," said Mrs. Graham, with her face grown a little pale, "that my husband is not in the habit of associating with low scoundrels of any kind. And I would rather not hear such things

said about the father of my particular friend."

Then she saw that that line would not do.

"Papa," she pleaded, "a little civility costs nothing. Why should you not call? You must have known it was this Mr. Winterbourne who had taken the shooting when we telegraphed you from Malta."

"I must have known? I did know! What has that to do with it? I do not let my friendship with my shootings. What my tenant may be is nothing to me, so long as he can pay; and he is welcome to everything he can find on the shooting; but it does not follow he is entitled to sit down at my table, or that I should sit down at his."

"But you were very kind to Yolande Winterbourne when she came up at first, and you knew whose daughter she was," pretty Mrs. Graham pleaded again.

"I did not know that that young jackass proposed to make her one of the family—it is too great an honour altogether!"

"You know, papa, it is such a pity to make trouble when it is not likely to help. Archie can marry whom he pleases——"

“Let him, and welcome!” said this fierce old gentleman. “He can marry whom he pleases; but he cannot compel me to associate with his wife’s father.”

She went away somewhat crestfallen, and sought out the Master, whom she found in one of the greenhouses.

“Well,” said he, with a smile—for he had anticipated the result.

“His lordship does seem opinionated about it,” she had to confess. “And yet I think I could talk him over, if only Aunt Colquhoun were absent. I suppose she will be back from Foyers by dinner-time.”

“I wish she were sewn in a sack, and at the bottom of Loch Ness,” said he.

“Archie, for shame! You see,” she added, thoughtfully, “I must get back to Fort Augustus by four to-morrow afternoon. And I haven’t come all this way without being resolved to see Yolande before I go. That leaves me little time. But still—have you asked Mr. Melville to speak to papa?”

“No. Jack Melville and I nearly quarrelled over it; so I dropped the subject. He doesn’t understand matters, don’t you know, Polly;

he doesn't understand what the improvement of a poor estate costs. He has forgotten his Horace—*pennis non homini datis*—that means that human beings aren't born with enough money. He made quite a fuss when I showed him that there were prudential reasons for the match; as if there were any use in blinding one's eyes to obvious facts. Well, I don't care. I have done my best. My intentions towards Lynn were sincere and honourable; now they can make a hash of the whole thing if they like."

"It is folly speaking like that," his sister said, sharply. "Surely you have too much spirit to yield to a little opposition of this kind—"

"A little opposition!" he said, with a laugh. "It's about as bulky as Borlum Hill; and I for one am not going to ram my head against it. I prefer a quiet life."

"But you are bound in honour to Yolande Winterbourne not to let the engagement cease!" she cried. "Why, to think of such a thing! You ask a girl to marry you; she consents; and then you throw her over because this person or that person objects.

Well, I never heard of one of the Leslies acting that way before! I was only a girl; but I showed them what stuff I was made of when they tried to interfere with me!"

"Oh, but that's different," he said, coolly. "Girls are romantic creatures. They rather like a shindy. Whereas men prefer a quiet life."

"Well, I never heard the like of that——"

"Wait a minute. I am going to talk to you plainly, Polly," said he. "I wanted to marry Janet Stewart; and I daresay she would have had me if I had definitely asked her——"

"I daresay she would!"

"Oh, you think she hasn't as much pride as anybody else because she is only a minister's daughter? That is all you know about her. However, they all made such a row, and you especially, that I consented to let the affair go. No doubt that was wise. I was young. She had no money; and Lynn wanted money. Very well. I made no objection. But you will observe, my dear Miss Polly, that when these stumbling-blocks are again and again put into the road, even the most patient of animals

may begin to get fractious, and might even kick over the traces. At present I hope I am not in a rage. But I am older now than I was then; and not in the least bit inclined to be made a fool of."

"And do you really mean to say," said Mrs. Graham, with her pretty dark gray eyes regarding him with astonishment, "that you are deliberately prepared to jilt Yolande Winterbourne merely on account of this little difficulty?"

"It isn't my doing," said he. "Besides, they seem bent on piling up about three cart-loads of difficulty. Life isn't long enough to begin and shovel that away. And if they don't want to have Corrievreak back, I dare-say Sir John will be quite willing to keep it."

"I don't think I will speak to papa again until after dinner," said she, musingly. "Then I will have another try—with Corrievreak."

CHAPTER VII.

THE AMBASSADOR.

Now Jack Melville—or Melville of Monaglen, as Mrs. Bell (with her own dark purposes always in view) proudly preferred to call him—had not only decided that the Master of Lynn should know that Yolande's mother was alive, but he had also undertaken himself to tell him all the facts of the case, to Mr. Winterbourne's great relief. Accordingly, one afternoon he gave the school-children a half-holiday and walked over to Lynn. He met the Master at the wooden bridge adjoining Lynn Towers; and also the dog-cart conveying Mrs. Graham back to Fort Augustus.

“There she goes,” said young Leslie, sardonically, as he regarded the disappearing vehicle. “She is a well-intentioned party. She thinks she can talk people over. She thinks that when people are in a temper they will listen to common sense. And she hasn't even now

learned a lesson. She thinks she would have succeeded with more time; but of course she has to get back to Inverstroy. And she still believes she would have had her own way, if she had had a day or two to spare."

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," said the other, carelessly. "Only his lordship in a fury at the idea of my marrying the daughter of a Radical. And of course it isn't the slightest use pointing out that Mr. Winterbourne's Radicalism generally consists in opposing what is really a Radical Government. And it isn't the slightest use pointing out that politics don't run in the blood; and that Yolande has no more wish to destroy the British Constitution than I have. However, what is the consequence? They can fight it out amongst themselves."

But Melville did not seem inclined to treat the matter in this off-hand way. His thoughtful face was more grave than was its wont. After a second or two he said—

"Look here, Archie; I have got something to say to you; will you walk along the strath a bit?"

“ You are going to try the loch ? ” said the Master, observing that his companion had his fishing-rod under his arm.

“ Yes, for an hour or so, if they are rising.”

“ I will come and manage the boat for you, then,” said the other, good-naturedly.

“ Then we can go on together to Allt-nam-ba. You are dining there, I suppose.”

“ Well, no,” said young Leslie, with a trifle of embarrassment.

“ But I was told I should meet you ! ”

“ I was asked. Well, you see, the lodge is small ; and it isn’t fair to overcrowd it, and give Yolande so much more housekeeping trouble. Then Macpherson may come down from Inverness any afternoon, almost, to arrange about the Glendyerg march. We have come to a compromise about that ; anything is better than a law-suit ; and the gully just above the watcher’s bothy remains ours, which is the chief thing.”

But Melville was not to be put off ; he knew this young man.

“ What is the real reason of your not going up to Allt-nam-ba this evening ? ”

“ Well, I will tell you if you want to know.

The real reason is that my people have treated the Winterbournes badly ; and I am ashamed of it ; and I don't want to go near the place more than I can help. If they imagine we are all very busy at Lynn that may be some excuse for neither my father nor my aunt having had the common civility to call at the lodge. But I am afraid Mr. Winterbourne suspects the true state of affairs ; and of course that puts me into rather a difficult position when I am at Allt-nam-ba ; and when you see a difficult position before you the best thing you can do is not to step into it."

"And do you expect everything to be made smooth and comfortable for you ?" said Melville, almost angrily. "Don't you expect to have any trouble at all in the world ? When you meet the difficulties of life, is your only notion to turn away and run from them ?"

"Yes ; as fast as I can and as far as I can. Look here, Jack ; different people have different views ; it doesn't follow that you are right because you look at things not as I do. You think common sense contemptible ; I think Quixotism contemptible : it cuts both

ways, you see. I say distinctly that a man who accepts trouble when he can avoid it is an ass. I know there are lots of women who like woe ; who relish it and revel in it. There are lots of women who enjoy nothing so much as a funeral ; the blinds all down ; a mysterious gloom in the rooms ; and weeping relations fortifying themselves all day long against their grief by drinking glasses of muddy port-wine and eating buns. Well, I don't. I don't like woe. I believe in what a young Scotch fellow said to me one morning on board ship when we were on the way out—I think he was a bagman from Glasgow—at all events he came up to me with an air of profound conviction on his face and said : ' Man, it's a seeckening thing to be seeck ! ' Well, that is the honest way of looking at it. And although I am arguing not so much with you as with Polly, still I may as well say to you what I said to her when she wanted me to do this, that, and the other thing : ' No ; if those people don't see it would be to their interest and to everybody's interest that this marriage should take place, they are welcome to their opinion. I shan't interfere. I don't mean to have any

domestic squabble if I can help it. I prefer a quiet life."

By this time they had reached the boat, which they dragged down to the water and shoved off, the Master of Lynn good-naturedly taking the oars. It was a pleasant warm afternoon; and it looked a likely afternoon for fishing, besides; but it was in a very silent and absent fashion that Jack Melville put his rod together and began to look over his casts. This speech of the young Master's was no revelation to him; he had known all that before. But, coming in just at this moment, it seemed to make the task he had undertaken more and more difficult and dangerous; and, indeed, there flashed across his mind once or twice some wild doubt as to the wisdom of his decision, although that decision had not been arrived at without long and anxious consideration.

And it was in a very perfunctory way that he began to throw out the flies upon the water, insomuch that one or two rises he got he missed through carelessness in striking. In any case the trout were not rising freely; and so at length he said—

“Archie, would you mind rowing over to the other side? One of the shepherds sent me word that the char have come there; and Miss Winterbourne has never seen one. I only want one or two to show her what they are like; I don’t suppose they will be worth cooking just now.”

“But you have no bait.”

“I can manage with the fly, I think.”

And so they rowed away across the pretty loch on this placid afternoon, the while Melville took off the cast he had been using, substituting three sea-trout flies of the most brilliant hues. Then, when they had got to the other side, Melville made for a part of the shore where the banks seemed to go very sheer down; and then proceeded to throw the flies over a particular part of the water, allowing them slowly to sink. It was an odd sort of fly-fishing, if it could be described as fly-fishing at all. For after the cast had been allowed to sink some couple of yards or so, the flies were slowly and cautiously trailed along; then there was a curious sensation as if an eel were swallowing something at the end of the line—very different from the quick

snap of a trout—and then, as he carefully wound in the reel there appeared in the water a golden-yellow thing, not fighting for its life as a trout would, but slowly, oilily circling this way and that until a scoop of the small landing-net brought the lethargic, feebly flopping, but beautifully golden-and-red-spotted fish into the boat. When he had got the two that he wanted, he had done with that ; it was not sport. And then he sat down in the stern of the boat, and his rod was idle.

“Archie,” said he, “there is something better in you than you profess.”

“Oh, come,” said the other, “char-fishing isn’t exciting ; but it is better than a lecture.”

“This is serious,” said the other, quietly ; “you yourself will admit that when I tell you.”

And then, very cautiously at first, and rather in a roundabout way, he told him the whole sad story ; begging him not to interrupt until he had finished ; and trying to invoke the young man’s pity and sympathy for what those people had suffered, and trying to put their action in a natural light, and trying to make clear their motives. Who was

to blame—the indiscreet sister who had invented the story, or the foolishly affectionate father who could not confess the truth? He would not say; he would rather turn to consider what they had attempted and succeeded in securing—that the beautiful child-nature of this girl should grow up untainted with sorrow and humiliation and pain.

The Master of Lynn heard him patiently to the end, without any expression of surprise or any other emotion. Then he said—

“ I suppose, Jack, you have been asked to tell me all this; most likely you are expected to take an answer. Well, my answer is clear. Nothing in the world would induce me to have anything to do with such a system, or conspiracy, or whatever it may be called. You may think the incurring of all this suffering is fine; I think it is folly. But that is not the point. I am not going to judge them. I have to decide for myself; and I tell you frankly I am not such a fool as to bring any skeleton into my cupboard. I don’t want my steps dogged; I don’t want to have to look at the morning paper with fear. If I had married and found this out after-

wards I should have said I had been grossly deceived; and now, with my eyes open, I consider I should be behaving very badly towards my family if I let them in for the possibility of any scandal or disgrace——”

“Why, man, how could there be any such thing!” Melville exclaimed; but he was interrupted.

“I let you have your say; let me have mine. There is no use beating about the bush. I can have nothing to do with any such thing; I am not going to run the risk of any public scandal while it can be avoided——”

“What would you do, then, if you were in Winterbourne’s position?”

“What would I do? What I would not do would be to incur a life-long martyrdom all for a piece of sentimental folly!”

“But what would you do? I want to know what you would do!”

“I would lock the woman up in a lunatic asylum! Certainly I would. Why should such a system of terrorism be permitted! It is perfectly absurd.”

“You cannot lock her up in a lunatic

asylum unless she is a lunatic ; and the poor creature does not seem to be that—not yet, at least——”

“ I would lock her up in a police-cell, then ! ”

“ And would that prevent exposure ? ”

“ At all events, it would prevent her going down and lying in wait for him in Westminster Palace Yard. But that is not the point. It is not what I would do in his place ; it is what I am going to do in my own. And that is clear enough. I have had enough bother about this business ; I am not going to have any more. I am not going to have any secrets and mysteries. I am not going to submit to any terrorism. Before I marry Yolande Winterbourne, all that affair of that lunatic creature must be arranged ; and arranged so that every one may know of it, without fear and trembling and dissimulation.”

“ The message is definite,” said Melville, absently, as his companion took up the oars and began to row across to the other side of the loch.

It was characteristic of this man that he

should now begin and try to look at this declaration from young Leslie's point of view, and endeavour to convince himself of its reasonableness; for he had a general wish to approve of people and their ways and opinions, having in the long run found that that was the most comfortable way of getting along in the world. And this that the Master had just said was, regarded from his own position, distinctly reasonable. There could be no doubt that Mr. Winterbourne had had his life perverted and tortured mainly through his trying to hide this secret from his daughter; and it was but natural that a young man should be unwilling to have his own life clouded over in like manner. Even John Shortlands had not sought to defend his friend when he told the story to Melville. As for himself—that is, Melville, well, he could not honestly approve of what Mr. Winterbourne had done—*except when he heard Yolande laugh.*

They rowed over to the other side in silence, and there got out.

“I hope I did not use any harsh terms, Jack,” the younger man said. “But the thing must be made clear.”

“I have been wondering,” said the other, “whether it would not have been better if I had held my tongue. I don’t see how either you or your wife could ever have heard of it.”

“I think it would have been most dishonourable of you to have known that and to have kept it back from me.”

“Oh you do?”

“Most distinctly I do!”

“There is some consolation in that. I thought I was perhaps acting the part of an idle busybody, who generally only succeeds in making mischief. And I have been wondering what is the state of the law. I really don’t know. I don’t know whether a magistrate would consider the consumption of those infernal drugs to be drunkenness; and I don’t even know whether you can compulsorily keep in confinement one who is a confirmed drunkard.”

“You may very well imagine that I don’t want to have anything to do with police courts and police magistrates, or with lunatic asylums either, when I get married,” said young Leslie, when they had pulled the boat

up on the bank. "But this I am sure of, that you can always get sufficient protection from the law from annoyances of that sort, if you choose to appeal to it. On the other hand, if you don't,—if you try to shelter people from having their deserts,—if you go in for private and perfectly hopeless remedies,—then you have to stand the consequences. I declare to you that nothing would induce me to endure for even a week the anxiety that seems to have haunted Winterbourne for years and years."

"But then he is so desperately fond of Yolande, you see," Jack Melville said, with a glance.

Leslie flushed slightly.

"I think you are going too far."

"Oh, I hope not. I only stated a fact. Come, now, Archie," he said, in his usual friendly way, "call your common sense to you, that you are so proud of. You know I feel myself rather responsible. I don't want to think I have made any mischief——"

"You have made no mischief. I say you would have acted most dishonourably if you had kept this back."

“Well, now, take a rational view of the situation. No doubt you are vexed and annoyed by the opposition at home. That is natural. No one likes his relatives to object when he knows that he has the right and the power to choose for himself. But don’t transfer your annoyance over that matter to this, which is quite different. Consider yourself married and living at Allt-nam-ba or at Lynn ; how can the existence of this poor creature affect you in any way ? And, moreover, the poor woman cannot live long——”

“She might live long enough to break some more windows, and get everybody’s name into the paper,” said he. “You don’t suppose we should always be living in the Highlands ?”

“I want you to come along with me now to the lodge ; and you can say that after all you found you could come to dinner—there never were people so charmingly free from ceremony of any kind ; and after dinner you will tell Mr. Winterbourne that certainly you yourself might not have been prepared to do what he has done, during these years, for Yolande’s sake ; and perhaps that you could

not approve of it ; but that for the short time likely to elapse you would be content also to keep silence ; and you might even undertake to live in the Highlands until death should remove that poor creature and all possible source of annoyance. That would be a friendly, natural, human sort of thing to do ; and he would be grateful to you. You owe him a little. He is giving you his only daughter ; and you need not be afraid—he will make it easy for you to buy back Corrievreak and do all the other things you were speaking of. I think you might do that."

" Midsummer madness !" the other exclaimed, with some show of temper. " I can't imagine how you could expect such a thing. Our family is old enough to be haunted by a ghost, and we haven't started one yet ; but when we do start one, it won't be a police court sort of ghost, I can assure you. It is hard luck enough when one of one's own relatives goes to the bad—I've seen that often enough in families ; but voluntarily to take over some one else's relative who has gone to the bad, without even the

common protection of the policeman and the magistrate—no, thanks!"

"Then that is your message, I suppose."

"Most distinctly. I am not going into any conspiracy of secrecy and terrorism—certainly not. I told you that I liked a quiet life. I am not going to bother about other people's family affairs—assuredly I am not going to submit to any persecution or any possibility of persecution, however remote, about them."

"Very well."

"Don't put it harshly. I wish to be reasonable. I say they have been unreasonable and foolish; and I don't want to involve myself in the consequences. When I marry, I surely must have, as every human being in the country has, the right to appeal to the law. I cannot have my mouth gagged by their absurd secrets."

"Very well."

"And I fancy," the Master of Lynn added, as his eye caught a figure that had just come in sight far away up the strath, "that that is Yolande Winterbourne herself. You need not say that I had seen her before I left——" and

so he turned and walked away in the direction of Lynn Towers.

And was this indeed Yolande? Well, he would meet her with an unclouded face—for she was quick to observe; and all his talk would be about the golden char, and the beautiful afternoon, and the rubber of whist they sometimes had now after dinner. And yet he was thinking.

“I wonder if my way would do,” he was saying to himself, as he still regarded that advancing figure. “Perhaps it is Quixotic, as Archie would say. Statistics are against me; and statistics are horribly sure things, but sometimes they don’t apply to individual cases. Perhaps I have no business to interfere. No matter; this evening at least she shall go home to dinner with a light heart. She does not know that I am going to give her my *Linnaea borealis*.”

The tall figure now advancing to him was undoubtedly that of Yolande, and he guessed that she was smiling. She had brought out for a run the dogs that had been left in the kennel; they were chasing all about the hillside and the road in front of

her. The light of the sunset was on her face.

“Good evening, Miss Winterbourne,” said he, when they met.

“But I am going to ask you to call me Yolande,” said she, quite frankly and simply, as she turned to walk back with him to Alltnam-ba, “for I have not many friends ; and I like them all to call me Yolande.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A WALK HOME.

“But was not that Mr. Leslie?” she said.

“Oh yes, it was,” he answered, with an assumed air of indifference. “Yes. It is a pity he cannot dine with you this evening.”

“But why did he not come along now, for a minute even, when he was so far?”

She certainly was surprised; and there was nothing for him but to adopt the somewhat lame excuses that the Master in the first instance had offered him.

“I think he is expecting a lawyer from Inverness,” said he, rather quickly slurring over the various statements, “and if he came by the afternoon boat he would be due just about now. They have a good deal of business on hand just now at Lynn——”

“Yes, apparently that is true,” she said, with rather a singular gesture—very slight,

but significant. “We have not seen anything of them.”

“Well, you see,” he continued, in the most careless and cheerful way, “no doubt they know your father is occupied with the shooting, and you with your amateur house-keeping—which I am told is perfect. Mr. Shortlands says the lodge is beautifully managed.”

“Ah, does he?” said she, with a quick flush of genuine pleasure, “I am glad to hear that. And it is very simple now—oh, yes, for they are all so diligent and punctual. And now I have more and more time for my botany; and I am beginning to understand a little more of the arrangement, and it is interesting.”

“I consider you have done very well,” said he. “So well that you deserve a reward.”

“Ah, a prize?” said she, with a laugh. “Do you give prizes at your school? Well now—let me see—what shall I choose? A box of chocolates!”

“Did they allow you to choose your own prizes at Château Cold Floors? We don’t do that here. No; the reward I have in

store for you is the only specimen I have got of the *Linnaea borealis*—the only plant that bears the name of the great master himself, and such a beautiful plant, too ! I don't think you are likely to find it about here. I got mine at Clova ; but you can get everything at Clova."

"It is so kind of you," she said ; "but what am I to do with it ?"

"Start a herbarium. You ought to have plenty of time ; if not, get up an hour earlier. You have a fine chance here of getting the Alpine species. I have got some fresh boards and drying paper down from Inverness ; and I meant to lend you my hand-press ; but then I thought I might want it myself for some other purpose ; and as Mrs. Bell was glad to have the chance of presenting you with one, I said she might ; it will be down from Inverness to-morrow."

"But I cannot accept so much kindness —" she was about to protest, when he interrupted her.

"You must," he said, simply. "When people are inclined to be civil and kind to you, you have no right to snub them."

Suddenly she stopped short and faced him. There was a kind of mischief in her eyes.

“Will you have the same answer,” she asked, slowly, and with her eyes fixed on him, “when Mrs. Bell presents to you Monaglen?”

Despite himself a flush came over the pale, handsome features.

“That is absurd,” said he, quickly. “That is impossible. I know the Master jokes about it. If Mrs. Bell has any wild dreams of the kind——”

“If she has,” Yolande said, gravely, “if she wishes to be civil and kind, you have no right to snub her.”

“You have caught me, I confess it,” he said, with a good-natured laugh, as they resumed their walk along the wide strath. “But let us get back to the sphere of practical politics.”

He then proceeded to give her instructions about the formation of a herbarium; and in this desultory conversation she managed very plainly to intimate to him that she would not have permitted him to take so much trouble

had this new pursuit of hers been a mere holiday amusement. No ; she hoped to make something more serious of it ; and would it not be an admirable occupation for her when she finally came to live in these wilds, where occupations were not abundant ? And he (with his mind distraught by all sorts of anxieties) had to listen to her placidly talking about her future life there, as if that were to be all very plain sailing indeed. She knew of no trouble ; and she was not the one to anticipate trouble. Her chief regret at present was that her botanising (at least so far as the collection of plants was concerned) would cease in the winter.

“But you cannot live up here in the winter !” he exclaimed.

“Why not ?”

“You would be snowed up !”

“Could anything be more delightful than that ?” she said. “Oh, I see it all before me —like a Christmas picture. Big red fires in the rooms ; outside the sunlight on the snow ; the air cold and clear ; and papa going away over the hard sparkling hills to shoot the ptarmigan and the white hares. Don’t you

know, then, that papa will take Allt-nam-ba for all the year round when I come to live here? And if Duncan the keeper can live very well in the bothy, why not we in the lodge? Oh, I assure you it will be ravishing——”

“No, no, no; you could not attempt such a thing,” he said. “Why, the strath might be quite impassable with the snow. You might be cut off from the rest of the world for a fortnight or three weeks. You would starve.”

“Perhaps, then, you never heard of tinned meats?” she said, with an air of superiority.

“No, no; the people about here don’t do like that. Of course, in the winter, you would naturally go in to Inverness, or go south to Edinburgh, or perhaps have a house in London——”

“Oh no, that is what my papa would never, never permit—anything but London.”

“Well, then, Inverness is a pleasant and cheerful town. And I must say this for the Master, that he is not at all likely to prove an absentee landlord when his turn comes. He is quite as diligent as his father in looking

after the estate ; there won't be any reversal of policy when he succeeds, as sometimes happens."

"Inverness ?" said she, wistfully. "Yes ; perhaps Inverness—perhaps here—that is what my papa would prefer ; but London—ah no. And sometimes I think he is so sadly mistaken about me—it is his great affection, I know—but he thinks if I were in London I would hear too much of the attacks they make on him, and I might read the stupidities they put into the newspapers about him. He is so afraid of my being annoyed—oh, I know, for himself he does not care—it is all me, me—and the trouble he will take to watch against small annoyances that might happen to me, it is terrible and pitiable, only it is so kind. Why should I not go to the House of Commons ? Do they think I care about their stupidities ? I know they are angry because they have one man among them who will not be the slave of any party—who will not be a—a cipher ? is it ?—in a crowd—an atom in a majority—no, but who wishes to speak what he thinks is true."

"Oh, but, Yolande," said he (venturing

thus to address her for the first time), “I want you to tell me: do you ever feel annoyed and vexed when you see any attack on your father?”

She hesitated; she did not like to confess.

“It is a natural thing to be annoyed when you see stupidities of malice and spitefulness,” she said, at length—with the fair freckled face a shade warmer in colour than usual.

“For I can give you a panacea for all such wounds; or rather an absolute shield against them.”

“Can you—can you?” she said, eagerly.

“Oh yes,” he said, in that carelessly indifferent way of his. “When you see anybody pitching into your father, in the House or in a newspaper, all you have to do is to recall a certain sonnet of Milton’s. You should bear it about with you in your mind; there is a fine wholesome tone of contempt in it; and neither persons in public life nor their relatives should have too great a respect for other people’s opinions. It is not wholesome. It begets sensitiveness. You should always consider that your opponents are—are——”

“*Ames de boue!*” said Yolande, fiercely.

“ That is what I think when I see what they say of my papa.”

“ But I don’t think you would feel so much indignation as that if you would carry about this sonnet with you in your memory :

‘ I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty,
When straight a barbarous noise environs me
Of owls, and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs ;
As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs
Railed at Latona’s twin-born progeny,
Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
But this is got by casting pearls to hogs,
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
And still revolt when Truth would set them free.
License they mean when they cry Liberty ;
For who loves that must first be wise and good :
But from that mark how far they rove we see,
For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.’

There is a good, honest, satisfactory, wholesome contempt in it.”

“ Yes, yes ; will you write it down for me ?” said she, quickly and gratefully. “ Will you write it down for me when we get to the lodge ?”

“ If you like.”

When they drew near to the lodge, however, they found that something very unusual

was going forward. The whole of the women-servants, to begin with, were outside, and gazing intently in the direction of a hill-side just above the confluence of the Dun Water and the Crooked Water; while the pretty Highland cook was asserting something or other in strenuous terms. The moment they saw Yolande those young people fled into the house, like so many scurrying rabbits; but Sandy, the groom, being over near the kennel, did not hear, and remained perched up on the fence, using an opera-glass which he had filched from the dining-room mantelpiece. Yolande went over to him (as she had to kennel up the dogs in any case), and said to him—

“What is the matter, Sandy?”

He very nearly dropped with fright, but instantly recovered himself, and said, with great excitement—

“I think they are bringing home a stag, madam; I am sure that is it. I was seeing the powny taken down to cross the burn; and it was not the panniers that was on him; and there is the chentlemen standing by the bridge, looking.”

There certainly was a small group of figures standing on the farther side of that distant bridge—a slim, little structure slung on wires, and so given to oscillation that only one person could cross at a time. This performance, indeed, was now carefully going on; but what had become of the pony? Presently they saw something appear on the top of the bank on this side of the stream.

“It is a stag, undoubtedly, Yolande,” Jack Melville said (he had got hold of the opera-glass), “and I should say a good one. Now, how could that have come about? Never mind, I daresay your father will be delighted enough; and I should say Duncan will tune up his pipes this evening.”

Yolande looked through the glass, and was very much excited to see that small pony coming home with its heavy burden; but the gentlemen were now invisible, having passed behind a hillock. And so she sped into the house, fearful that the curiosity of the women-servants might have let affairs get behindhand, and determined that everything should be in readiness for the home-coming sportsmen.

Melville was left outside; and as he re-

garded, now the gillie leading the pony, and now the party of people who were visible coming over the hillock, it was not altogether of the dead stag that he was thinking. In this matter of the Master of Lynn he had only performed his thankless duty as messenger, as it were ; still, it was not pleasant to have to bring back bad news. Sometimes he wished he had had nothing whatever to do with the whole complication ; then, again, he reminded himself that that secret had been confided to him by John Shortlands unsolicited ; and that he, Melville, had subsequently done what he honestly thought best. And then he turned to think about Yolande. Would he grudge anything he could do for that beautiful child-nature—to keep it clear and bright and peaceful ? No, he could not. And then he thought, with something of a sigh, that those who were the lucky ones in this world did not seem to place much value on the prizes that lay within their hand's reach.

The corpulent John Shortlands, as he now came proudly along, puffed and blowing and breathless, clearly showed by his radiant face

who had shot the stag ; and at once he plunged into an account of the affair for the benefit of Jack Melville. He roundly averred that no such "fluke" was known in English history. They were not out after any stag. No stag had any right to be there. They had passed up that way in the morning, with the dogs. Nor could this have been the wounded stag that the shepherds had seen drinking out of the Allt-corrie-an-Eich some four days ago. No ; this must have been some wandering stag that had got startled out of some adjacent forest, and had taken refuge in the glen just as the shooting-party were coming back from the far tops. Duncan had proposed to have a try for a few black game when they came down to these woods ; and so, by great good luck, John Shortlands had put a No. 4 cartridge in his left barrel, just in case an old black-cock should get up wild. Then he was standing at his post when suddenly he heard a patterning ; a brown animal appeared with head high and horns thrown back ; the next instant it passed him, not more than fifteen yards off, and he blazed at it—in his nervousness with the right barrel ;

then he saw it stumble, only for a second ; then on it went again, he after it, down to the burn, which fortunately was rushing red with the last night's rain ; in the bed of the stream it stumbled again and fell ; and as it struggled out and up the opposite bank, there being now nothing but the breadth of the burn between him and it, he took more deliberate aim, fired, and the stag fell back, stone-dead, its head and horns, indeed, remaining partly in the water.

Then Mr. Winterbourne, when he came along, seemed quite as honestly pleased at this unexpected achievement as if the stag had fallen to his own gun ; while as for Duncan, the grim satisfaction on his face was sufficient testimony.

“ This is something like a good day's work,” said he. “ And I was bringing down the stag for Miss Winterbourne to see it, before the dark ; and now Peter will take back the powny for the panniers.”

But Jack Melville took occasion to say to him, aside—

“ Duncan, Miss Winterbourne will look at the head and horns when you have had time

to take a sponge or a wet cloth to them, don't you understand?—later on in the evening, perhaps."

"Very well, sir. And I suppose the gentlemen will be sending in the head to Mr. Macleay's to-morrow? It is not a royal; but it is a very good head whatever."

"How many points—ten?"

"Yes, sir. It is a very good head whatever."

Yolande had so effectively hurried up everything inside the lodge that when the gentlemen appeared for dinner, it was they, and not the dinner, who were late. And of course she was greatly delighted also; and all the story of the capture of the stag had to be described over again, to the minutest points. And again there was a fierce discussion as to who should have the head and horns, John Shortlands being finally compelled to receive the trophy which naturally belonged to him. Then a wild skirl outside in the dark.

"What is that, now?" said John Shortlands.

"That," said Yolande, complacently—for

she had got to know something of these matters—"is the Pibroch of Donald Dhu."

"That is the Pibroch of Donald Black, I suppose," said John Shortlands, peevishly. "What the mischief have I to do with Donald Black? I want the Pibroch of John Shortlands. What is the use of killing a stag if you have to have somebody else's pibroch played? If ever I rent a deer-forest in the Highlands, I will have my own pibroch made for me, if I pay twenty pounds for it."

Indeed, as it turned out, there was so much joy diffused throughout this household by the slaying of the stag, that Jack Melville, communing with himself, decided that his ill news might keep. He would take some other opportunity of telling Shortlands the results of his mission. Why destroy his very obvious satisfaction? It was a new experience for him; he had never shot a stag before. The cup of his happiness was full to the brim; and nobody grudged it him, for he was a sound-hearted sort of man.

One rather awkward incident arose, however, out of this stag episode. In the midst of their dinner-talk, Yolande suddenly said—

“Papa, ought I to send a haunch of venison to Lynn Towers? It seems so strange to have neighbours, and not any compliment one way or the other. Should I send a haunch of venison to Lord Lynn?”

Her father seemed somewhat disturbed.

“No, no, Yolande; it would seem absurd to send a haunch of venison to a man who has a deer-forest of his own.”

“But it is let.”

“Yes, I know; but no doubt the tenant will send in a haunch to the Towers if there is any occasion——”

“But I know he does not, for Archie said so. Mr. Melville,” she said, shifting the ground of her appeal, “Would it not be a nice compliment to pay to a neighbour? Is it not customary?”

His eyes had been fixed on the table; he did not raise them.

“I—I don’t think I would,” said he, with some little embarrassment. “You don’t know what fancies old people might take. And you will want the venison for yourselves. Besides, Mr. Shortlands shot the stag; you should let him have a haunch to send to his friends in the South.”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes, certainly!” she cried, clapping her hands. “Why did I not think of it? That will be much better.”

At another time John Shortlands might have protested; but something in Melville’s manner struck them, and he did not contend that the haunch of venison should be sent to Lynn Towers.

After dinner they went out into the dark, and, guided by the sound of the pipes, made their way to the spacious coach-house, which they found had been cleared out, and in which they found two of the gillies and two of the shepherds—great, huge, red-bearded, brawny men—dancing a four-some reel, while Duncan was playing as if he meant to send the roof off. The head and horns of the deer were hung up on one of the pillars of the loose-box. The place was ruddily lit up by two lamps, as well as a few candles; there was a small keg of whisky in a dim corner. And Yolande thought that the Highland girls might just as well come over from the lodge (the English Jane was of no use), and very soon the dancing-party was made much more picturesque. But where was the Master of Lynn, with the

torchlight dance he had promised them on the occasion of their killing their first stag?

When Jack Melville was going away that night he was surprised to find the dog-cart outside, Sandy in his livery, the lamps lit, and warm rugs on the front seat.

“This is not for me?” he said.

“It is indeed,” said Yolande.

“Oh, but I must ask you to send it back. It is nothing for me to walk to Gress. You have enough work for your horses just now.”

“The night is dark,” she said, “and I wish you to drive—you will have the light of the lamps.”

“Why should I drive to Gress,” he said.

“But I wish it,” she answered.

And that was enough.

CHAPTER IX.

DANGER.

IT might have appeared to any careful observer, who also knew all the circumstances of the case, that what was now happening, or about to happen, away up in those remote solitudes, was obvious enough ; but certainly no suspicion of any such possibilities had so far entered the minds of the parties chiefly interested. Yolande regarded her future as already quite settled. That was over and done with. Her French training had taught her to acquiesce in any arrangement that seemed most suitable to those who hitherto had guided her destiny ; and as she had never experienced any affection stronger than her love for her father, so she did not perceive the absence of any such passion. To English eyes her marriage might seem a *mariage de complaisance*, as Colonel Graham had styled it ; in her eyes it seemed every-

thing that was natural, and proper, and fitting ; and she was quite content. It never occurred to her to analyse the singular satisfaction she always felt in the society of this new friend—the sense of safety, trust, guidance, and reliance with which he inspired her. He claimed a sort of schoolmasterish authority over her ; and she yielded—sometimes, it is true, reasserting her independence by the use of feminine wiles and coquettices which were as natural as the scamperings of a young rabbit or the rustling of the leaves of a tree ; but more ordinarily submitting to his dictation and government with a placid and amused sense of security. While, as for him, had he dreamed that he was stealing away the affections of his friend's chosen bride, he would have fled from the spot on the instant, with shame and ignominy haunting him. But how could such an idea present itself to him ? He looked on her as one already set apart. She belonged to the Master of Lynn : as his friend's future wife he hoped she also would be his friend. He admired her bright spirits, her cheerfulness and frankness ; but it was this very frankness (added to his own blunt

disregard of conventionalities) that was deceiving them both. Five minutes after she had asked him to call her Yolande, she was talking to him of her future home and her married life; and she was as ready to take his advice in that direction as in the direction of drying plants and setting up an herbarium. And if sometimes she reversed their relations, and took to lecturing him on his unwise ways at Gress—his carelessness about his meals, and so forth—why, then he humoured her, and considered her remonstrances as only an exhibition of friendly interest, perhaps with a trifle of gratitude added, for he knew very well that he had spent a good deal of time in trying to be of service to her.

Then, at this particular moment, everything seemed to conspire towards that end which neither of them foresaw. Yolande found the domestic arrangements at Allt-nam-ba flow very easily and smoothly, so that practically she had the bulk of the day at her own disposal; and Gress was a convenient halting-place when she went for a drive, even when she had no particular message or object in view. But very frequently she had

a distinct object in view which led to her sending on the dog-cart to Foyers and awaiting its return. On the very morning, for example, after Jack Melville had dined with them, she got the following letter, which had been brought out from Whitebridge late the night before. The letter was from Mrs. Bell ; and the handwriting was singularly clear and precise for a woman now over sixty, who had for the most part educated herself.

“ Gress, Wednesday.

“ MY DEAR YOUNG LADY — Excuse my forwardness in sending you a letter ; but I thought you would like to hear the good news. The lawyers write to me from Edinburgh that young Mr. Fraser is now come of age, and that the trustees are now willing to sell the Monaglen estate, if they can get enough for it. This is what I have looked forward to for many’s the day ; but we must not be too eager like ; the lawyers are such keen bodies, and I have not saved up my scraps to feed their pigs. I think I would like to go to Edinburgh myself, if it was not that they lasses would let everything

go to rack and ruin, and would have no sense to study Mr. Melville's ways ; the like of them for glaiket hussies is not in the land. But I would greatly wish to see you, dear young lady, if you will honour me so far, before I go to Edinburgh ; for I cannot speak to Mr. Melville about it ; and I do not wish to go among they lawyers with only my own head to guide me. — I am, your humble servant,

CHRISTINA BELL."

Yolande laughed when she got this letter, partly with pure joy over the great good fortune which was likely to befall her friend, and partly at the humour of the notion that she should be consulted about the conveyancing of an estate. However, she lost no time in making her preparations for driving down to Gress ; and indeed the dog-cart had already been ordered, to take some game into Foyers, and also the stag's head destined for Mr. Macleay. Yolande saw that everything was right ; got a brace of grouse and a hare for Mrs. Bell ; and then set out to drive away down the strath—on this changing,

gloomy, and windy day that had streaked the troubled surface of the loch with long white lines of foam.

She found Mrs. Bell much excited, but still scarcely daring to talk above a whisper ; while from time to time she glanced at the laboratory, as if she feared Mr. Melville would come out to surprise them in the discussion of this dark secret.

“He is not in the schoolhouse, then ?” Yolande said.

“Not the now. You see, the young lad Dalrymple that he got from Glasgow College is doing very well now ; and Mr. Melville is getting to be more and more his own maister. He canna aye be looking after they bairns ; and if we could get Monaglen for him, who would expect him to bother his head aboot a school ? He’s done enough for the folk about here ; he’ll have to do something for himself now—ah, Miss Winterbourne, that will be a prood day for me when I hand him over the papers.”

She spoke as if it were a conspiracy between these two.

“But it will be a sair, sair job to get him

to take the place," she continued, reflectively, "for the man has little common sense ; but he has pride enough to move mountains."

"Not common sense?" said Yolande, with her eyes showing her wonder. "What has he, then? I think it is always common sense with him. When you are talking with him, and not very sure what to do, whatever he says is always clear, straight, and right ; you have no difficulty ; he sees just the right way before you. But how am I to help you, Mrs. Bell?"

"Well, I dinna ken, exactly ; but the idea of an auld woman like me going away to Edinburgh among a' they lawyers is just dreadfu'. It's like Daniel being put into the den of lions."

"Well, you know, Mrs. Bell," Yolande said, cheerfully, "no harm was done to him. The lions did not touch a hair of his head."

"Ay, I ken that," said Mrs. Bell, grimly ; "but they dinna work miracles nowadays."

"Surely you must have your own lawyers?" the girl asked.

"I have that."

“You can trust them, then; with them you are safe enough, surely?”

“Well, this is the way o’t,” said Mrs. Bell, with decision. “It is not in the nature o’ things for a human being to trust a lawyer—it’s no possible. But the needcessity o’ the case drives ye into their hands, and ye can only trust in Providence that they will make the other side suffer, and no you. They’re bound to make their money out o’ somebody. I’m no saying, ye ken, but that the lawyers that have been doing business for ye for a nummer o’ years might no be a bit fairer; for it’s their interest to carry ye on, and be freens wi’ ye; but dear me, when I think of going away to Edinburgh, a’ by mysel’, among that pack o’ wolves, it’s enough to keep one frae sleeping at nights.”

“But every one says you are so shrewd, Mrs. Bell!”

“Do they?” she responded, with a pleased laugh. “Just because I kenned what they men were after? It needed no much judgment to make that out. Maybe if I had been a young lass, they could ha’ persuaded me; but when I was a young lass, with

scarcely a bawbee in my stocking, there was never a word o't; and when they did begin to come about, when I was an auld woman, I kenned fine it was my bank-book they were after. It didna take much judgment to make that out—the idiwuts! Ay, and my lord, too—set him up with his eight months in London by himsel'; and me finding him the money to put saut in his kail. Well, here am I bletherin' about a lot o' havers like that, as if I was a young lass out at the herdin'; when I wanted to tell ye, my dear young leddy, just how everything was. Ye see, what I was left was, first of a', the whole of the place in Leicestershire, and a beautifu' country-side it is, and a braw big house, too, though it was not likely I was going to live there, in a state not becoming to one like me, and me wanting to be among my own people besides. Then there was some money in Consols, which is as safe as the Bank, as the saying is; and some shares in a mine in Cornwall. The shares I was advised to sell, and I did that, for I am not one that cares for risk; but when I began to get possession of my yearly money, and when I found that

what I could save was mounting up and mounting up in jist an extraordinary way, I put some o' that into French stock, as I thought I might take a bit liberty wi' what was my own making in a measure. And now, though it's no for me to boast, it's a braw sum—a braw sum; and atweel I'm thinking that a fine rich English estate, even by itsel', should be able to buy up a wheen bare hillsides in Inverness-shire, even if we have to take the sheep ower at a valuation —ay, and leave a pretty penny besides. I declare when I think o' what might ha' happened, I feel I should go down on my knees and thank the Almighty for putting enough sense in my head to see what they men were after; or by this time there might not be stick or stone to show for it—a' squandered away in horse-racing or the like—and Mr. Melville, the son of my auld master, the best master that ever lived, going about from one great man's house to another, teaching the young gentlemen, and him as fit as any o' them to have house and ha' of his ain——”

She stopped suddenly; for both of them now saw through the parlour window Jack

Melville himself come out of his laboratory, carelessly whistling. Doubtless he did not know that Yolande was in the house, else he would have walked thither; and probably he had only come out to get a breath of fresh air, for he went to a rocking-chair close by the garden, and threw himself into it, lying back with his hands behind his head. Indeed, he looked the very incarnation of indolence—this big-boned, massive-shouldered young man, who lay there idly scanning the skies.

“I am going out to scold him for laziness,” said Yolande.

“Please no, my dear young leddy,” Mrs. Bell said, laying her hand gently on the girl’s arm. “It is now he is working.”

“Working! Does it look like it? Besides, I am not so afraid of him as you are, Mrs. Bell. Oh yes, let me go.”

So she went out and through the little lobby into the garden; coming upon him, indeed, quite unawares.

“Mrs. Bell says I must not speak to you,” she said. “She says you are working, and must not be disturbed. Is it so? And

what is the work? Is it travelling at 68,000 miles an hour?"

"Something like that," said he; and he forgot to rise, while she remained standing. Then he glanced round the threatening sky again. "You were brave to venture out on a morning like this."

"Why? What is there?"

"Looks like the beginning of a storm," said he. "Here we are fairly sheltered; but there are some squalls of wind going across. I hope you won't all be blown down the strath into the loch to-night."

"Ah, but I do not believe any longer in weather prophecies," she said, tauntingly. "No. I do not think any one has any knowledge of it—at Allt-nam-ba, at all events. It is never five minutes the same. One moment you are in the clouds; the next—in sunlight! Duncan looks up the hill in the morning, and is very serious; before they have got to the little bridge, there is blue sky! It is all chance. Do you think science can tell you anything? You, now, when you brought that instrument"—and here she regarded a solar machine, the mirrors and brass mount-

ings of which were shining clear even on this dull day—"did you expect to get enough sunlight at Gress for you to distil water?"

A twinkle in the clear gray eyes showed that she had caught him.

"There are mysteries in science that cannot be explained to babes," said he (and she thought it rather cool that he remained sitting, or rather lounging, instead of going and fetching a chair for her). "Everything isn't as easy as snipping out the name of a genus and pasting it at the foot of a double sheet of white paper."

"That is good of you to remind me," she said, without in the least being crushed. "One thing I came for to-day was the *Linnæa borealis*."

Then he instantly jumped to his feet.

"Certainly," said he; "come along into the house. You may as well take back the boards, and drying paper, and so forth, with you; and I will show you how to use them now. There may be a few other things you should have out of my herbarium, just to start you, as it were—not rare plants, but plants you are not likely to get up at Allt-

nam-ba. Are you superstitious. I will give you a four-leaved clover, if you like."

"Did you find it?"

"Yes—in a marshy place in Glencoe."

"But it is the finder to whom it brings luck, as I have read," Yolande said.

"Oh, is it so?" he answered, carelessly. "I am not learned in such things. If you like you can have it; and in the meantime we will start you with your *Linnæa* and a few other things. I don't suppose the hand-press has arrived yet; but mind, you must not refuse it."

"Oh no," said she, gravely repeating the lesson of yesterday. "When one wishes to be civil and kind to you, you have no right to snub him."

The repetition of the phrase seemed to remind him; he suddenly stopped short, regarding her with an odd, half-amused look in his eyes.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I hope so."

"Well, now," he said, rather under his voice, "I am going to tell you a secret, which on no account must you tell to Mrs.

Bell. I have just heard, on very good authority, that Monaglen is about to come into the market, after all."

"Oh, indeed," said she, with perfectly innocent eyes. "Can it be possible!"

"Don't mention the thing to Mrs. Bell; for you know her wild schemes and visions; and it would only make her unhappy."

"Why, then?"

"Because what she means to do (if she really means to do it) is not practicable," he said, plainly. "Of course, if she buys Monaglen for herself, good and well. She is welcome to sit in the hall of my fathers. I daresay she will do more good in the neighbourhood than they ever thought of doing, for she is an excellent kind of creature. And it is just possible that, seeing me about the place, she may have thought of some romantic project; but when once I am clear away from Gress, it will quite naturally and easily fade from her mind."

"But you are not going away!" she said. And that sudden sinking of the heart ought to have warned her; but, indeed, she had not had a wide experience in such matters.

“ Oh yes,” said he, good-naturedly. “ How could this makeshift last? Of course, I must be off—but not this minute or to-morrow. I have started a lot of things in this neighbourhood—with Mrs. Bell’s money, mind—and I want to see them going smoothly; then I’m off.”

She did not speak. Her eyes were distant; she was scarcely conscious that her heart was so disappointed and heavy. But she was vaguely aware that the life she had been looking forward to in these far solitudes did not seem half so full and rich now. There was some loneliness about it—a vacancy that the mind discerned but did not know how to fill up. Was it the gloom of the day? She thought of Allt-nam-ba in the winter; it had no longer any charm for her. There was no mischief in her brain now, no pretended innocence in her eyes. Something had befallen—she scarcely knew what. And when she followed him into the house, to get the *Linnæa borealis*, that little pathetic droop of the mouth was marked.

That same afternoon, as she was driving home, and just above the little hill that goes

down to the bridge adjacent to Lynn Towers, she met the Master, who was coming along on horseback. The drive had been a sombre one, somehow; for the skies were gloomy and threatening. But when she saw him she brightened up, and gave him a very pleasant greeting.

“You are quite a stranger,” said she, as they both stopped.

“We have had a good many things to attend to at the Towers,” he said—as she thought, rather distantly.

“I hear them talking of having a hare drive some day soon—away at a great distance, at the highest parts. You will come and help them, I suppose?”

“I think I must go in to Inverness; and I may have to be there for some days.”

“You will come and see us before you go, then?” she inquired—but rather puzzled by the strangeness, almost stiffness, of his manner.

“I hope so,” said he. “I am glad to see you looking so well. I hear they have been having good sport at Allt-nam-ba. Well, I must not detain you. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”—and she drove on, wondering. He had not even asked how her father was. But perhaps these business affairs were weighing on his mind.

CHAPTER X.

THE GALE.

As night fell the storm that Jack Melville had foreseen began to moan along the upper reaches of the hills; and from time to time smart torrents of rain came rattling down, until the roar of the confluent streams out there in the dark sounded ominously enough. All through the night, too, the fury of the gale steadily increased; the gusts of wind sweeping down the gorge shook the small building (although solidly built of stone) to its very foundations; and even the fierce howling of the hurricane was as nothing to the thunder of the now swollen waters, that seemed to threaten to carry away the whole place before them. Sleep was scarcely possible to the inmates of this remote little lodge; they knew not what might not happen up in this weather-brewing caldron of a place; and at last, after an anxious night, and towards

the blurred gray of the morning, they must have thought their worst fears were about to be realised, for suddenly there was a terrific crash, as if part of the building had given way. Almost instantly every bedroom door was opened ; clearly no one had been asleep. And then, through a white cloud of dust, they began to make out what had happened ; and although that was merely the falling in of part of the ceiling of the hall, of course they did not know how much more was likely to come down, and Mr. Winterbourne called to Yolande, sternly forbidding her to stir. John Shortlands was the first to venture out ; and through the cloud of plaster-dust he began to make his examinations, furnished with a long broom-handle that he obtained from one of the frightened maids.

“ It is all right,” he said. “ There are one or two other pieces that must come down ; then the rest will be safe. Yolande, you can go back to bed. What ? Well, then, go back and shut your door anyway, until I get Duncan and the gillies to shovel this stuff away. Don’t come out until I tell you.”

John Shortlands then went downstairs,

got a cap, and opened the hall-door. The spectacle outside was certainly enough to deter any but the bravest. There was no rain; but the raging hurricane seemed to fill the atmosphere with a gray mist; while from time to time a gust would sweep down into the bed of the stream, tear the water there into a white smoke, and then whirl that up the opposite hillside until it was dissolved in the general vapour. But these water-spouts, he quickly perceived, were only formed down there in the opener stretches of the strath, where the gusts could get freely at the bed of the stream; up here at Allt-nam-ba there was nothing but the violence of the wind that came in successive shocks against the lodge, shaking it as if it were in the grip of a vice.

He ventured out. His first experience was to find his deer-stalking cap, which he greatly prized, whirled from off his head, and sent flying away in the direction of the Allt-cam-bân. But he was not to be daunted. He went indoors again and got another; and then, going out and putting his bullet head and his splendid bulk against the wind he fairly butted his way across to the bothy.

He found Duncan trying to put up some boards where a window had been blown in ; and an angry man was he when he learnt from Mr. Shortlands what had happened at the lodge.

“ The Master will give it him ! ” he said, savagely.

“ Whom ? ”

“ The plasterer from Inverness, sir. I was telling him it was no use mending and mending ; but that it was a whole new ceiling that was wanted, after such a wild winter as the last winter. The Master will be very angry. The young lady might have been hurt.”

“ The young lady might have been hurt ! ” said John Shortlands, ironically. “ Yes, I should think so, if she happened to have been passing. But in this part of the country, Duncan, is it only women who are hurt when the ceiling of a house falls on them ? The men don’t mind ? ”

Duncan was quite impervious to irony, however. He went away to get Sandy and the rest of them to help him in shovelling off the plaster—going out, indeed, into this raging

tempest in his shirt-sleeves and with a bare head, just as if nothing at all unusual were happening.

Of course, with the inhabitants of the lodge there was no thought of stirring out that day. They built up the fires in the little dining and drawing rooms, and took to books, or the arrangement of flies, or the watching at the window how the gale was still playing its cantrips—tearing at the scant vegetation of the place, and occasionally scooping up one of those vaporous waterspouts from the bed of the stream. Then Yolande managed to do a little bit of household adornment—with some audible grumbling.

“ Dear me,” she said, standing at the dining-room fire, “ did ever any one see two such untidy persons? There is a fine row of ornaments for a mantel-shelf. I wonder what Madame would say. Let us see: first, some cartridges—why are they not in the bag? Second, a dog-whistle. Third, some casting-lines. Fourth, a fly-book—well, I will make a little order by putting the casting-lines in the book——”

“ Let them alone, Yolande,” her father

said, sharply. “ You will only make confusion.”

She put them in, nevertheless ; and continued her enumeration.

“ Fifth, some rifle-cartridges ; and if one were to fall in the fire, what then ? Sixth, the stoppers of a fishing-rod. Now, the carelessness of it ! Why does not Duncan take your rod to pieces, Mr. Shortlands, and put in the stoppers ? I know where he keeps it, outside the bothy, just over the windows ; and think now how it must have been shaken last night. Think of the varnish ! ”

“ I believe you’re right, Yolande,” said he ; “ but it saves a heap of trouble.”

“ Seventh, a little silver fish in a box—a deceitful little beast all covered with hooks. Eighth, a flask, with whisky or some horrid-smelling stuff in it : ah, Madame, what would you think ? Then a telescope—well, that is something better—that is something better —*allons*, we will go and look at the storm.”

Looking out of the window was clearly impracticable, for the panes were blurred ; but she went to the hall-door, opened it, and

directed the glass down the valley. She was quite alone ; the others were busy with their books. Then suddenly she called to them—

“Come, come ! There is some one that I can see—oh ! imagine any one fighting against such a storm ! A stranger ? Perhaps a friend from England ? Ah, such a day to arrive ! Or perhaps a shepherd ?—no, there are no dogs with him——”

Well, the appearance of a human being on any day, let alone such a day as this, in this upland strath, was an event ; and instantly they were all at the door. They could not make him out ; much less could they guess on what errand any one, stranger or friend, should be willing to venture himself against such a gale. But that figure away down there kept making headway against the wind. They could see how his form was bent—his head projecting forward. He was not a shepherd : as Yolande had observed, he had no dogs with him. He was not the Master of Lynn ; that figure belonged to a bigger man than the Master.

“I’ll tell you who it is,” said John Short-

lands, curtly. “It’s Jack Melville. Three to one on it.”

“Oh, the folly—the folly!” Yolande exclaimed, in quite real distress. “He will be blown over a rock——”

“Not a bit of it!” said John Shortlands, to comfort her. “The people about here don’t think anything of a squall like this. Look at Duncan there—marching down to dig some potatoes for the cook. A head-keeper in the south wouldn’t be as good-natured as that, I warrant you. They are much too swell gentlemen there.”

And it was Jack Melville, after all. He was very much blown when he arrived, but he soon recovered breath, and proceeded to say that he had been afraid that the gale might catch the boat and do some mischief.

“And it has,” said he. “It is blown right over to the other side; and apparently jammed between some rocks. So I have come along to get Donald and one of the gillies to go with me; and we will have it hauled clear up on the land——”

“Indeed, no!” Yolande protested, with pleading in her face. “Oh no!—on such a

day why should you go out? Come in and stay with us! What is a boat, then——”

“But,” said he, with a sort of laugh, “I am afraid I am partly responsible for it. I was the last that used the boat——”

“Never mind it,” said she; “what is it—a boat! No, you must not go through the storm again.”

“Oh, but we are familiar with these things up here,” said he, good-naturedly. “If you really mean to invite me in, I will come—after Donald and I have gone down to the loch.”

“Will you?” she said, with her bright face full of welcome and gladness.

“I must come back with my report, you know,” said he. “For I am afraid she may have got knocked about; and if there is any damage I must make it good——”

“Nonsense!” Mr. Winterbourne interrupted.

“Oh, but I must. It is Lord Lynn’s boat; and there are people from whom one is not quick to accept an obligation. But then there are other people,” said he, turning to Yolande, “from whom you can receive any

number of favours with great pleasure ; and if you don't mind my staying to lunch with you—if I may invite myself to stay so long——”

“ Do you think I would have allowed you to go away before ! ” she said, with a touch of pride in her tone ; she had got to know something of Highland ways and customs.

So he and Donald and two others went away down the glen ; and in about a couple of hours came back with the report that the boat was now placed in a secure position ; but that it had had two planks stove in, and would have to be sent to Inverness for repair—Jack Melville insisting on taking over that responsibility on his own shoulders, although, as a matter of fact, the Master of Lynn had assisted him in dragging the boat up on the last occasion on which it had been used. As for Yolande, she did not care for any trumpery boat : was it not enough that their friend should have come to keep them company on this wild and solitary day ? Then there was another thing. She had determined to astonish the gentlemen with the novelty of a hot luncheon ; and here was another who

would see what the little household could do! Indeed, it was a banquet. Her father drew pointed attention to the various things (though he was himself far enough from being a gourmand). A venison pasty John Shortlands declared to have been the finest dish he had encountered for many a day. He wished to heavens they could make a salad like that at the Abercorn Club.

“Is it not nice to see them so grateful?” said she, turning with one of her brightest smiles to the stranger guest. “The poor things! No wonder they are pleased. The other day I climbed away up the hill to surprise them at their lunch—oh, you cannot imagine the miserableness of it! Duncan told me where I should find them. The day was so dull and cold; the clouds low down; and before I was near the top, a rainy drizzle began——”

“They generally say a drizzling rain in English,” her father said.

“But we are not in England. It is a rainy drizzle in the Highlands, is it not, Mr. Melville?”

“It does not matter how you take it,” he answered; “but we get plenty of it.”

“ Then the cold wet all around ; and the heather wet ; and I went on and on—not a voice—not a sign of any one. Then a dog came running to me—that was Bella—and I said to myself ‘ Aha, I have found you now ! ’ Then we went on ; and at last—the spectacle ! —the poor people all crouched down in a peat-hag, hiding from the rain ; papa seated on a game-bag that he had put on a stone ; Mr. Shortlands on another ; their coat-collars up ; the plates on their knees ; the knives, forks, cold beef, and bread, all wet with the rain—oh, such a picture of miserableness has never been seen. Do you wonder that they are grateful, then—do you wonder they approve—when they have a fire, and a warm room, and dry plates, and dry knives and forks ? ”

Indeed, they had a very pleasant meal ; and the coffee and cigars after it lasted a long time ; for of what good was anything but laziness so long as the wind howled and roared without ? All the time, however, Jack Melville was wondering how he could have a few minutes’ private talk with Mr. Shortlands ; and as that seemed to be becoming less and less

probable—for Mr. Winterbourne seemed content to have an idle day there in his easy-chair by the fire, and Yolande was seated on the hearthrug at his knees, quite content to be idle too—he had to adopt a somewhat wild pretext. John Shortlands was describing the newest variety of hammerless gun; then he spoke of the one he himself had bought just before coming north. Melville pretended a great interest. Was it in the bothy? Yes. Might they not run over for a couple of minutes? Yolande protested; but John Shortlands assented; so these two ventured out together to fight their way across.

Instead of going into the central apartment of the bothy, however, where the guns stood on a rack, Melville turned into the next apartment, which was untenanted, and which happened to be warm enough, for Duncan had just been preparing porridge for the dogs, and a blazing fire still burned under the boiler.

“I wanted to say a word to you.”

“I guessed as much. What’s your news?”

“Well, not very good,” said Jack Melville, rather gloomily, “and I don’t like to be the

bearer of bad news. I meant to tell you the other evening ; and I could not do it somehow."

"Oh, out with it, man ! never fear. I like to hear the worst, and then hit it on the head with a hammer, if I can. There would have been none of this trouble if I had had my way from the beginning—however, that's neither here nor there."

"I am afraid I am the bearer of an ultimatum," Melville said.

"Well?"

It was clear that Melville did not like this office at all. He kept walking up and down the earthen floor, though the space was limited enough—his brows contracted—his eyes bent on the ground.

"It is awkward for me," he said, rather impatiently. "I wish I had had nothing to do with it. But you cannot call me an intermeddler ; for you yourself put this thing on me ; and—and—well, it is not my business either to justify or condemn my friend—I can only tell you that I considered it was safest and wisest he should know the true state of affairs—if I have erred in that, well——"

“I don’t think you have,” said Shortlands, slowly. “I left it open to your decision—to your knowledge of this young fellow. But I think my decision would, in any case, have been the same.”

“Very well. I think I put the whole matter fairly to him. I told him that he had practically no risk to run of any annoyance; and that the cause of all this trouble, poor wretch, would soon be out of the way; and then I told him what Mr. Winterbourne had gone through for the sake of his daughter. Well, he did not seem to see it that way. He was quite frank. He said it was a mistaken Quixotism that had been at the bottom of it all——”

“I said so, too; but still——”

“It is a matter of opinion; it is of no immediate consequence,” Melville said. “But what he seemed quite resolved on was that he would not consent to become a party to this secrecy. He says everything must be met and faced. There must be no concealment; in short, Yolande must be told the whole story, so that, in case of any further annoyance, there should be no dread of her

discovering it, but only the simple remedy of appealing to a constable."

John Shortlands considered for a minute or two.

"I don't know that he isn't quite right," he said, slowly. "Yes, I imagine his position is a fair one. At one time I said the same. I can look at it from his point of view. I think we must admit, as men of the world, that he is perfectly in the right; but," and here he spoke a little more quickly, "I can't help speaking what is on my mind; and I say that, if you think of what Winterbourne has done for this girl, this ultimatum, if you call it so—from the fellow who pretends to be her sweetheart, from the fellow who wants her for a wife—well, I call it a damned shabby thing!"

Melville's face flushed.

"I am not his judge," he said, coldly.

"I beg your pardon," John Shortlands said—for his anger was of short duration. "I ought to have remembered that this young Leslie is your friend, as Winterbourne is mine. I beg your pardon—I can do no more."

“Yes, you can,” said Melville, in the same measured way. “I wish you distinctly to understand that I express no opinion whatsoever on Mr. Leslie’s decision; and I must ask you to remember that I certainly cannot be supposed to approve of it simply because I am a messenger.”

“Quite so—quite so—I quite understand,” John Shortlands said. “The least said the easiest mended. Let’s see what is to be done. I suppose there was no doubt in his mind—no hesitation?”

“None.”

“It would be no good trying to talk him over?”

“I, for one, will not attempt it. No, his message was distinct. I think you may take it as final. Perhaps I ought to add that he may have been influenced by the fact that his people at the Towers seem to have been quarrelling with him about this marriage; and he has not the best of tempers at times; and I think he feels injured. However, that is not part of my message. My message was distinct, as I say. It was, in fact, an ultimatum.”

“Poor Winterbourne,” John Shortlands said, absently. “I wonder what he will look like when I tell him. All his labour and care and anxiety gone for nothing. I suppose I must tell him ; there must be an explanation ; I daresay that young fellow won’t come near the Lodge now until there is an understanding. Winterbourne will scarcely believe me. Poor devil—all his care and anxiety gone for nothing ! I don’t mind about her so much. She has pluck ; she’ll face it. But Winterbourne—I wonder what his face will look like to-night when I tell him.”

“Well, I have done my best and my worst, I suppose, however it turns out,” said Jack Melville, after a second or two. “And now I will bid you good-bye.”

“But you are going into the house ?”

“No.”

“No ?” said the other, in astonishment. “You’ll bid them good-bye, I suppose ?”

“I cannot !” said Melville, turning himself away in a manner. “Why, to look at that girl—and to think of the man she is going to marry having no more regard for her than to——”

But he suddenly recalled himself: this was certainly not maintaining his attitude of impartiality.

“Yes,” said he, “I suppose I must go in to bid them good-bye.”

They were loth to let him depart; Mr. Winterbourne, indeed, wishing him to remain for dinner and stay the night. But they could not prevail on him; and soon he was making his way with his long strides down the glen, the gale now assisting instead of impeding his progress. John Shortlands (who was apt to form sudden and rather violent prepossessions and prejudices) was looking after him, as the tall figure grew more and more distant.

“There goes a man,” he was saying to himself; “and I wish to heavens he would kick that hound!”

CHAPTER XI.

SURMISES.

THE gale was followed by heavy rain ; there was no going out the next day. But, indeed, it was not of shooting that those two men were thinking.

“ He might have spared her—he might have spared her ! ” was Mr. Winterbourne’s piteous cry, as he sat in his friend’s room, and gazed out through the streaming windowpanes on the dismal landscape beyond.

And who was to tell her ? Who was to bring grief and humiliation on that fair young life ? Who was to rob her of the beautiful dream and vision that her mother had always been to her ? Not he for one. He could not do it.

And then (for he was a nervous, apprehensive man, always ready to conjure up distressing possibilities) might she not misunderstand all this that had been done to keep her in

ignorance? Might she not be angry at having all her life been surrounded by an atmosphere of concealment? If she were to mistake the reason of her father's having stooped to subterfuge and deceit? Was Yolande going to despise him, then—she, the only being in the world whose opinion he cared for? And always his speculations, and fears, and anxious conjectures came back to this one point—

“He might have spared her—he might have spared her.”

“Now, look here, Winterbourne,” John Shortlands said, in his plain-spoken way. “If I were you, before I would say a word of this story to Yolande, I would make sure that that would be sufficient for him. I don’t know. I am not sure. He says that Yolande must be told; but will that suffice? Is that all he wants? If I were in your place, I would have a clear understanding. Do you know, I can’t help thinking there is something behind all this that hasn’t come out. If this young fellow is really in earnest about Yolande—if he is really fond of her—I don’t think he would put this stumbling-block in the way—I don’t think he would exact this sacrifice from

you—unless there was some other reason. Yesterday afternoon Melville said as little as he could. He didn't like the job. But he hinted something about a disagreement between young Leslie and his family over this marriage."

"I guessed as much," said Mr. Winterbourne. "Yes, I have suspected it for some time. Otherwise I suppose his father and aunt would have called on Yolande. They know each other. Yolande stayed a night at the Towers when Mrs. Graham first brought her here—until the lodge was got ready."

"Of course, if the fellow has any pluck, he won't let that stand in his way. In the meantime, a domestic row isn't pleasant; and I daresay he is impatient and angry. Why should he revenge himself on Yolande, one might ask? But that is not the fair way of putting it. I can see one explanation. I didn't see it yesterday; and the fact was I got pretty wild when I learned how matters stood; and my own impression was that kicking was a sight too good for him. I have been thinking over it since, though; the rain last night kept me awake. And now I can

understand his saying ‘Well, I mean to marry in spite of them ; but I will take care, before I marry, to guard against any risk of their being able to taunt me afterwards.’ And then, no doubt, he may have had some sort of notion that when there was no more concealment, when every one knew how matters stood, some steps might be taken to prevent the recurrence of—of—you know. Well, there is something in that. I don’t see that the young fellow is so unreasonable.”

Mr. Winterbourne was scarcely listening ; his eyes looked haggard and wretched.

“When I took this shooting,” he said, absently, “when the place was described to me, on the voyage out, I thought to myself that surely there Yolande and I would be safe from all anxiety and trouble. And then again, up the Nile, day after day I used to think of her being married and settled in this remote place, and used to say to myself that then, at least, everything would be right. And here we are, face to face with more trouble than ever !”

“Nonsense, man, nonsense !” John Shortlands said, cheerfully. “You exaggerate

things. I thought this mountain-work would have given you a better nerve. Everything will be right—in time. Do you expect the young people never to have any trouble at all? I tell you everything will be right in time. You pull up your courage; there is nothing so dreadful about it; and the end is certain—wedding-bells, old slippers, speeches, and a thundering headache the next morning, after confectioner's champagne."

The haggard eyes did not respond.

"And who is to tell her? The shock will be terrible—it may kill her."

"Nonsense—nonsense! Whoever is to tell her, it must not be you. You would make such a fuss; you would make it far more desperate than it is. Why, you might frighten her into declaring that she would not marry—that she would not ask her husband to run the risk of some public scandal. That would be a pretty state of affairs—and not unlikely on the part of a proud-spirited girl like that. No, no; whoever tells her must put the matter in its proper light. It is nothing so very desperate. It will turn out all right. And you for one should be very

glad that the Master, as you call him, now knows the whole story ; for after the marriage, whatever happens, he cannot come back on you and say you had deceived him."

"After the marriage ! And what sort of a happy life is Yolande likely to lead when his relatives object to her already ?"

"There you are off again ! More difficulties ! Why, man, these things must be taken as they come. You don't know that they object—and I don't believe they can object to her, though the old gentleman mayn't quite like the colour of your politics. But supposing they do, what's the odds ? They can't interfere. You will settle enough on Yolande to let the young couple live comfortably enough, until the old gentleman and his sister arrive at common sense—or the churchyard. I don't see any difficulty about it. If only those people were to marry whose friends and relatives on both sides approved, you might just as well cut the Marriage Service out of the Prayer-book at once."

This was all that was said at the time ; and it must be admitted that it left Mr. Winterbourne pretty much in the same mood

of anxious perturbation. His careworn face instantly attracted Yolande's notice ; and she asked him what was the matter. He answered that there was nothing the matter—except the dulness of the day, perhaps ; and for the moment she was satisfied. But she was not long satisfied. She became aware that there was trouble somewhere ; there was a kind of constraint in the social atmosphere of the house ; she even found the honest and hearty John Shortlands given to moody staring into the fire. So she went to her own room, and sat down, and wrote the following note :—

“ Allt-nam-ba, Friday.

“ MY DEAR ARCHIE—We are all in a state of dreadful depression here, on account of the bad weather, and the gentlemen shut up with nothing to do. Please, please, take pity on us, and come along to dinner at seven. Last night, in spite of the gale, Duncan played the *Hills of Lynn* outside after dinner ; and it seemed a kind of message that you ought to have been here. I believe the gentlemen have fixed next Tuesday, if the weather is fine, for the driving of the hares on the far

off heights ; and I know they expect you to go with them ; and we have engaged a whole crowd of shepherds and others to help in the beating. There is to be a luncheon where the *Uska-nan-Shean*, as Duncan calls it, but I am afraid the spelling is not right, comes into the Allt Crôm, and it will not be difficult for me to reach there, so that I can see how you have been getting on. Do you know that Monaglen is for sale ?—what a joy it will be if Mr. Melville should get it back again, after all—that will indeed be *Melville's Welcome Home !* You will make us all very happy if you will come along at seven, and spend the evening with us.—Yours affectionately,

YOLANDE."

She sent this out to be taken to Lynn Towers by one of the gillies who was to wait for an answer ; and in something more than an hour the lad on the sturdy little black pony brought back this note :—

“ Lynn Towers, Friday afternoon.

“ DEAR YOLANDE—I regret very much that I cannot dine with you to-night ; and as for Tuesday, I am afraid that will be also impos-

sible, as I go to Inverness to-morrow. I hope they will have a good day.—Yours sincerely,

A. LESLIE."

She regarded this answer at first with astonishment; then she felt inclined to laugh.

"Look at this, then, for a love-letter!" she said to herself.

But by and by she began to attach more importance to it. The coldness of it seemed studied; yet she had done nothing that she knew of to offend him. What was amiss? Could he be dissatisfied with her conduct in any direction? She had tried to be most kind to him, as was her duty; and until quite recently they had been on most friendly terms. What had she done? Then she began to form the suspicion that her father and John Shortlands were concealing something—she knew not what—from her. Had it anything to do with the Master? Had it anything to do with the singular circumstance that not even the most formal visiting relationship had been established between Lynn Towers and the Lodge? Why did her father seem disturbed when she proposed to send a haunch

of venison to the Towers—the most common act of civility?

It was strange that, with these disquieting surmises going on in her brain, she should think of seeking information and counsel, not from her father, nor from Mr. Shortlands, nor from the Master of Lynn, but from Jack Melville. It was quite spontaneously and naturally that she thought she would like to put all her difficulties before him; but on reflection she justified herself to herself. He was most likely to know, being on friendly terms with everybody. If there was nothing to disquiet her—nothing to reproach herself with—he was just the person to laugh the whole thing away and send her home satisfied. She could trust him. He did not treat her quite so much as a child as the others did. Even when he spoke bluntly to her, in his schoolmasterish way, she had a vague and humorous suspicion that he was quite aware that their companionship was much more on a common footing than all that came to; and that she submitted because she thought it pleased him. Then she had got to believe that he would do much for her. If she asked

him to tell her honestly what he knew, he would. The others might try to hide things from her; they might wish to be considerate towards her; they might be afraid of wounding her sensitiveness; whereas she knew that if she went to John Melville he would speak straight to her, for she had arrived at the still further conclusion that he knew he could trust her, as she trusted him. Altogether, it was a dangerous situation.

Next morning had an evil and threatening look about it; but fortunately there was a brisk breeze; and towards noon that had so effectually swept the clouds over that the long wide valley was filled with bright warm sunshine. Yolande resolved to drive in to Gress. There was no game to take to Foyers; but there were two consignments of household materials from Inverness to be fetched from Whitebridge. Besides, she wanted to know what Mrs. Bell had done about Monaglen and the lawyers. And besides she wanted to know where *Alchemilla arvensis* ended and *A. alpina* began; for she had got one or two varieties that seemed to come in between; and she had all a beginner's

faith in the strict lines of species. There was, in short, an abundance of reasons.

On arriving at Gress, however, she found that Mr. Melville, having finished his forenoon work in the school, had gone off to his electric storehouse away up in the hills, and so she sent on the dog-cart to Whitebridge, and was content to wait awhile with Mrs. Bell.

“I’ll just send him a message, and he’ll come down presently.”

“Oh no, please don’t; it is a long way to send any one,” Yolande protested.

“It’s no a long way to send a wee bit flash o’ fire, or whatever it is, that sets a bell ringing up there,” said the old dame. “It’s wonderful, his devices. Sometimes I think it’s mair than naatural. Over there, in the laboratory, he has got a kind of ear-trumpet; and if you take out the stopper, and listen in quateness, you’ll hear every word that’s going on in the school.”

“That is what they call a telephone, I suppose?”

“The very thing!” said Mrs. Bell, as she left the room to send a message to him.

When she came back, she was jubilant.

“ My dear young leddy, I am that glad to see ye! I’ve sent the letter.”

“ What letter?”

“ To the lawyers. Oh, I was a lang, lang time thinking o’t; for they lawyers are kittle cattle to deal wi’; and I kenned fine if I was too eager they would jalouse what I was after; and then they would be up to their pranks. So I just telled them that I did not want Monaglen for myself—which is as true’s the Gospel—but that if they happened to hear what was the lowest price that would be taken, they might send me word, in case I should come across a customer for them. It doesna do to be too eager about a bargain, especially wi’ they lawyers; it’s just inviting them to commit a highway robbery on ye.”

“ If Mr. Melville,” said Yolande, quickly, “ were to have Monaglen, he would still remain in this neighbourhood, then?”

“ Nae doot aboot that! It’ll be a’ a man’s wark to put the place to rights again; for the factor is a puir body, and the young gentleman never came here—he has plenty elsewhere, I have been told.”

“Mr. Melville would still be living here?” said Yolande, eagerly.

“At Monaglen, ay; and it’s no so far away. But it will make a difference to me,” the old dame said, with a sigh. “For I have got used to his ways about the hoose; and it will seem empty, like.”

“Then you will not go to Monaglen?”

“Deed, no; that would never do. I wouldna like to go as a servant, for I have been living too long in idleness; and I couldna go back in any other kind of a way, for I ken my place. Na, na; I will just bide where I am, and I will keep £220 a year, or thereabouts, for mysel’; and wi’ that I can mak ends meet brawly, in spite o’ they spendrif hussies.”

These romantic projects seemed to have a great fascination for this good dame (who had seen far less that was attractive in the prospect of being given away in marriage by a famous Duke); and she and Yolande kept on talking about them with much interest, until a step outside on the gravel caused the colour to rush to the girl’s face. She did not know that, when she rose on his entrance.

She did not know that she looked embarrassed, because she did not feel embarrassed. Always she had a sense of safety in his presence. She had not to watch her words, or think of what he was thinking of what she was saying. And on this occasion she did not even make the pretence of having come about *Alchemilla alpina*. She apologised for having brought him down from his electric works ; asked him if he would take a turn in the garden for a minute or two, as she had something to say to him ; and then went out, he following. She did not notice that when she made this last remark his face looked rather grave.

“ Mr. Leslie went to Inverness this morning ? ” she said, when they were out in the garden.

“ Yes ; he looked in as he was passing.”

“ Do you know why he went ? ”

“ Well,” said he, “ I believe they have been having some dispute about the marches of the forest ; but I am told it is to be all amicably settled. I fancy Archie is going to have the matter squared up in Inverness.”

She hesitated then. She took up a flower ;

regarded it for a second ; and then looked him fair in the face.

“ Mr. Melville,” said she, “ do you think it strange that I ask you this question ?—you are Mr. Leslie’s friend : is he offended with me ? ”

His eyes were looking at hers, too—rather watchfully : he was on his guard.

“ I have not the slightest reason to suppose that he is,” was the answer, given with some earnestness, for he was glad to find the question so simple.

“ None ? I have not done anything that he could complain of—to you or any one ? ”

“ I assure you I never heard him breathe a word of the kind. Besides,” added he, with a very unusual warmth in the pale cheeks, “ I wouldn’t listen. No man could be such a coward—— ”

“ Oh, please don’t think that I am angry,” she said, with earnest entreaty. “ Please don’t think I have to complain. Oh no ! But every one knows what mischief is wrought sometimes by mistake ; some one being offended and not giving a chance of explanation ; and—and—I was only anxious to be

assured that I had done nothing to vex him. His going away without seeing us seemed so strange—yes ; and also his not coming of late to the lodge ; and—and—my papa seems to be troubled about something : so that I became anxious ; and I knew you would tell me the truth, if no one else would. And it is all right, then ? There is no reason to be disturbed, to be anxious ? ”

He was disturbed at all events ; and sorely perplexed. He dared not meet her eyes ; they seemed to read him through and through when he ventured to look up.

“ Don’t imagine for a moment that you have anything to reproach yourself with—not for a moment,” he said.

“ Has any one, then ? ”

“ Why, no. But—but—well, I will be honest with you, Yolande ; there has been a little trouble—at the Towers. The old people are not easy to please ; and—and Archie has too much spirit to allow you to be dragged into a controversy, you see ; and as they don’t get on very well together, I suppose he is glad to get off for a few days to Inverness.”

“Ah, I understand,” she said, slowly. “That is something to know. But why did he not tell me? Does he think I am afraid of a little trouble like that? Does he think I should be frightened? Oh no. When I make a promise, it is not to break it. He should have trusted me more than that. Ah, I am sorry he has to go away on my account. Why did he not speak? It is strange.”

And then she regarded him with those clear, beautiful, contemplative eyes of hers.

“Have you told me everything?”

He did not answer.

“No. There is more. There is more to account for my papa’s trouble—for his going away this morning. And why do I come to you?—because I know that what you know you will tell to me. You have been my friend since ever we came to this place.”

He could not withstand her appeal; and yet he dared not reveal a secret which was not his own.

“Yolande,” said he, and he took her hand to emphasise his words, “there is more; but it is not I who must tell you. What I can

tell you, and what I hope you will believe, is that you are in no way the cause of anything that may have happened. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. And any little trouble there may be will be removed in time, no doubt. When you have done your best, what more can you do? ‘The rest is with the gods.’”

It is just possible that she might have begged him to make a candid confession of all that he knew—for she had a vague fear that she herself was the cause of that anxiety which she saw too visibly in her father’s look—but at this moment the dog-cart drove up to the front gate, and she had to go. She bade him, and also Mrs. Bell, good-bye almost in silence; she went away thoughtfully. And as he watched her disappear along the highroad—the warm westering light touching the red-gold of her hair—he was thoughtful too; and his heart yearned towards her with a great pity; and there was not much that this man would not have done to save her from the shadow that was about to fall on her young life.

CHAPTER XII.

“DARE ALL.”

HE could not rest, somehow. He went into the laboratory, and looked vacantly around ; the objects there seemed to have no interest for him. Then he went back to the house —into the room where he had found her standing ; and that had more of a charm for him : the atmosphere still seemed to bear the perfume of her presence, the music of her voice still seemed to hang in the air. She had left on the table—she had forgotten, indeed—a couple of boards inclosing two specimens of the *Alchemilla*. These he turned over, regarding with some attention the pretty, quaint French handwriting at the foot of the page—“*Alchemilla alpina. Alpine Lady's-mantle. Allt-nam-ba, September, 188—*” ; but still his mind was absent ; he was following in imagination the girl herself, going away along the road

there, alone, to meet the revelation that was to alter her life.

And was he going to stand by, idle? Was he going to limit himself to the part he had been asked to play—that of mere message-bearer? Could he not do something? Was he to be dominated by the coward fear of being called an intermeddler? He had not pondered over all this matter (with a far deeper interest than he himself imagined) without result. He had his own views, his own remedy; he knew what counsel he would give, if he dared intervene. And why should he not dare? He thought of the expression of her face as she had said, with averted eyes, “Good-bye!” and then—why, then, a sudden impulse seized him that somehow and at once he must get to Allt-nam-ba, and that before she should meet her father.

He snatched up his hat and went quickly out and through the little front garden into the road; there he paused. Of course, he could not follow her; she must needs see him coming up the wide strath; and in that case what excuse could he give? But what if the shooting party had not yet come down from

the hill? Might he not intercept them somewhere? Sometimes, when they had been taking the far tops in search of a ptarmigan or two, they came home late—to be scolded by the young house-mistress for keeping dinner back. Well, the result of these rapid calculations was that the next minute he had set out to climb, with a swiftness that was yet far too slow for the eagerness of his wishes, the steep and rough and rugged hills that stretch away up to the neighbourhood of Lynn forest.

First it was over peat-bog and rock; then through a tangled undergrowth of young birches; then up through some precipitous gullies; until at last he had gained the top and looked abroad over the forest—that wide, desolate, silent wilderness. Not a creature stirred; not even the chirp of a chaffinch broke the oppressive stillness; it seemed a world of death. But he had no time to take note of such matters; besides the solitude of a deer-forest was familiar to him. He held along by the hill-top, sometimes having to descend into sharp little gullies and clamber up again, until, far below him, he came in

sight of Lynn Towers, and the bridge, and the stream, and the loch ; and onwards still he kept his way, until the strath came in view, with Allt-nam-ba, and a pale blue smoke rising from the chimneys into the still evening air. Probably Yolande had got home by that time ; perhaps she might be out and walking round the place—talking to the dogs in the kennel, and so forth. So he kept rather back from the edge of the hill-top, so that he should not be descried, and in due time arrived at a point overlooking the junction of three glens, down one of which the shooting-people, if they had not already reached the lodge, were almost certain to come.

He looked and waited, however, in vain ; and he was coming to the conclusion that they must have already passed and gone on to the lodge, when he fancied he saw something move behind some birch bushes on the hill-side beyond the glen. Presently he made out what it was—a pony grazing, and gradually coming more and more into view. Then he reflected that the pony could only be there for one purpose ; that probably the attendant gillie and the panniers were hidden from sight

behind those birches ; and that, if it were so, the shooting party had not returned, and were bound to come back that way. A very few minutes of further waiting proved his conjectures to be right ; a scattered group of people, with dogs in to heel, appearing on the crest of the hill opposite. Then he had no further doubt. Down this slope he went at headlong speed ; crossed the rushing burn by springing from boulder to boulder ; scrambled up through the thick brushwood and heather of the opposite banks ; and very soon encountered the returning party, who were now watching the panniers being put on the pony's back.

Now that he had intercepted Mr. Winterbourne, there was no need for hurry. He could take time to recover his breath ; and also to bethink himself as to how he should approach this difficult matter ; and then, again, he did not wish those people to imagine that he had come on any important errand. And so the conversation, as the pony was being loaded, was all about the day's sport. They had done very well, it appeared ; the birds had not yet got wild, and there was no sign

of packing ; they had got a couple of teal and a golden plover, which was something of a variety ; also, they had had the satisfaction of seeing a large eagle—which Duncan declared to be a Golden Eagle—at unusually close quarters.

Then they set out for home : Duncan and the gillies making away for a sort of ford by which they could get the pony across the Dun Water ; while the three others took a nearer way to the lodge by getting down through a gullie to the Corrie-an-Eich, where there was a swing-bridge across the burn. When they had got to the bridge, Melville stopped them.

“ I am not going on with you to the lodge,” said he. “ Mr. Winterbourne, I have seen your daughter this afternoon. She is troubled and anxious ; and I thought I’d come along and have a word with you. I hope you will forgive me for thrusting myself in where I may not be wanted ; but—but it is not always the right thing to ‘ pass by on the other side.’ I couldn’t in this case.”

“ I am sure we are most thankful to you for what you have done already,” Yolande’s father said, promptly ; and then he added, with

a weary look in his face, “and what is to be done now, I don’t know. I cannot bring myself to this that Leslie demands. It is too terrible. I look at the girl—well, it does not bear speaking of.”

“Look here, Winterbourne,” John Shortlands said, “I am going to leave you two together. I will wait for you the other side. But I would advise you to listen well to anything that Mr. Melville has to say; I have my own guess.”

With that he proceeded to make his way across the narrow and swaying bridge, leaving these two alone.

“What I want to know, first of all,” Mr. Winterbourne said, with a kind of despair in his voice, “is whether you are certain that the Master will insist? Why should he? How could it matter to him? I thought we had done everything when we let him know. Why should Yolande know? Why make her miserable to no end? Look what has been done to keep this knowledge from her all through these years; and you can see the result in the gaiety of her heart. Would she have been like that if she had known—if she

had always been thinking of one who ought to be near her, and perhaps blaming herself for holding aloof from her? She would have been quite different; she would have been old in sadness by this time; whereas she has never known what a care was. Mr. Melville, you are his friend; you know him better than any of us; don't you think there is some chance of reasoning with him and inducing him to forego this demand? It seems so hard.”

The suffering that this man was undergoing was terrible. His questions formed almost a cry of entreaty; and Jack Melville could scarcely bring himself to answer in what he well knew to be the truth.

“I cannot deceive you,” he said, after a second. “There is no doubt that Leslie's mind is made up on the point. When I undertook to carry his message he more than once repeated his clear decision——”

“But why? What end will it serve? How could it matter to them—living away from London? How could they be harmed?”

“Mr. Winterbourne,” said the other, with something of a clear emphasis, “when I

reported Leslie's decision to Mr. Shortlands, as I was asked to do, I refused to defend it—or to attack it, for that matter—and I would rather not do so now. What I might think right in the same case—what you might think right—does not much matter. I told Mr. Shortlands that perhaps we did not know everything that might lead to such a decision; Leslie has not been on good terms with his father and aunt, and he thinks he is being badly used. There may be other things; I do not know."

"And how do we know that it will suffice?" the other said. "How do we know that it will satisfy him and his people? Are we to inflict all this pain and sorrow on the girl, and then wait to see whether that is enough?"

"It is not what I would do," said Jack Melville, who had not come here for nothing.

"What would you do, then? Can you suggest anything?" her father said, eagerly. "Ah, you little know how we should value any one who could remove this thing from us!"

"What I would do? Well, I will tell you. I would go to that girl, and I would see how much of the woman is in her; I think you

will find enough. I would say to her : ‘ There is your mother ; that is the condition she has sunk into through those accursed drugs. Every means has been tried to save her without avail—every means save one. It is for you to go to her—you yourself—alone. Who knows what resurrection of will and purpose may not arise within her, when it is her own daughter who stands before her and appeals to her—when it is her own daughter who will be by her side during the long struggle ? That is your duty as a daughter ; will you do it ? ’ If I know the girl, you will not have to say more ! ’

The wretched man opposite seemed almost to recoil from him in his dismay. “ Good God ! ” he muttered ; and there was a sort of blank, vague terror in his face. Melville stood silent and calm, awaiting an answer.

“ It is the suggestion of a devil,” said this man, who was quite aghast, and seemed scarcely to comprehend the whole thing just yet, “ or else of an angel. Why—— ”

“ It is the suggestion neither of a devil nor an angel,” said Melville, calmly, “ but of a man who has read a few medical books.”

The other, with the half horror-stricken look in the eyes, seemed to be thinking hard of all that might happen ; and his two hands clasped together over the muzzle of his gun, which was resting on the ground, were trembling.

“ Oh, it is impossible—impossible ! ” he cried at length. “ It is inhuman. You have not thought of it sufficiently. My girl to go through *that* ; have you considered what you are proposing to subject her to ? ”

“ I have considered,” Jack Melville said (perhaps with a passing qualm ; for there was a pathetic cry in this man’s voice) ; “ and I have thought of it sufficiently, I hope. I would not have dared to make the suggestion without the most anxious consideration.”

“ And you would subject Yolande to *that* ? ”

“ No,” said the other, “ I would not. I would not subject her to anything ; I would put the case before her, and I know what her own answer would be. I don’t think any one would have to use prayers and entreaties. I don’t think it would be necessary to try much persuasion. I say this—put the case before her, and I will stake my head I can

tell what her answer will be—what her decision will be—yes, and before you have finished your story !”

“ And to go alone——”

“ She will not be afraid !”

He seemed to have a very profound conviction of his knowledge of this girl’s nature ; and there was a kind of pride in the way he spoke.

“ But why alone ?” pleaded the father—he seemed to be imagining all kinds of things with those haggard eyes.

“ I would not have the mental shock lessened by the presence of any one. I would have no possible suspicion of a trap—a bait—a temptation. I would have it between these two : the daughter’s appeal to her mother. I am not afraid of the result.”

“ She could not ! My girl to go away by herself—she could not ! it is too terrible !”

“ Try her.”

“ She has never travelled alone. Why, even to go to London by herself——”

“ Oh, but that has nothing to do with it. That is not what I mean at all. As for that her maid would go with her as a matter of

course ; and Mr. Shortlands might see her as far as London if he is going south shortly, as I hear. She could put up at one or other of the hotels that she has already stayed at with you. Then you would give her the address ; *and leave the rest to her.*"

" You have been thinking over this," Mr. Winterbourne said. " I have not. I am rather bewildered about it. Shall we ask Shortlands ?"

" If you wish. But first let me explain, Mr. Winterbourne. As I understand, several arrangements have been made with this poor woman—only, unhappily to be broken by her. Well, now, why I want Yolande to go alone—if you think the experiment should be tried at all—is to prevent suspicion in the poor woman's mind. I would have no third person. It should be a matter between the two women themselves ; and Yolande must insist on seeing her mother alone."

" Insist ! Yes, and insist with two such wretches as those Romfords ! Why, the man might insult her—he might lay hands on her, and force her out of the house."

Melville's pale, dark face grew darker at .

this ; and his eyes had a sudden, sharp fire in them.

“She must have a policeman waiting outside,” he said, curtly. “And her maid must go inside with her—but not necessarily into the room.”

“And then,” said Mr. Winterbourne—who was apparently picturing all this before his mind ; “supposing she were to get her mother away with her—what then ?”

“She would take her back to the hotel. She must have a private sitting-room, of course. Then in two or three days’ time, when she had got the necessary travelling-things for her mother, she would take her down to some quiet seaside place—Eastbourne or Bournemouth, or some such place—and get rooms there. The two women would get to know each other that way ; Yolande would always be with her ; her constant society would be her mother’s safeguard.”

“You have thought of everything—you have thought of everything,” the father murmured. “Well, let us see what Shortlands says. It is a terrible risk. I am not hopeful myself. The thing is—is it fair to bring all

this distress and suffering on the girl on such a remote chance?"

"You must judge of that," said Melville. "You asked me what I would do. I have told you."

Mr. Winterbourne was about to step on to the bridge—across which only one could go at a time; but he suddenly turned back and said, with some earnest emphasis, to the younger man—

"Do not imagine that because I hesitate I think any the less of your thoughtfulness. Not many would have done as much. Whatever happens, I know what your intentions were towards us." He took Melville's hand for a moment, and pressed it. "And I thank you for her sake and for my own. May God bless you!"

When they got to the other side they found John Shortlands seated on a boulder of granite, smoking a cigar. He was not much startled by this proposal—for Melville had mentioned something of the kind to him in an interjectional sort of fashion, some time before; and he had given it a brief, but rather unfavourable, consideration. Now as they

talked the matter over, it appeared that he stood about mid-way between these two ; having neither the eager enthusiasm of Jack Melville nor yet the utter hopelessness of his friend Winterbourne.

“ If you think it is worth trying, try it,” said he, coolly. “ It can’t do much harm. If Yolande is to know, she may as well know to some end. Other things have been tried, and failed ; this might not. The shock might bring her to her senses. Anyhow, don’t you see, if you once tell Yolande all about it, I rather fancy she will be dissatisfied until she has made a trial.”

“ That is what I am certain of,” Melville said, quickly. “ I would contentedly leave it to herself. Only the girl must have some guidance.”

“ Surely, surely,” said John Shortlands. “ I consider your plan very carefully laid out — if Winterbourne will risk it. The only other way is to leave Yolande in her present happy ignorance ; and tell the Master of Lynn, and his father, and his aunt, and whatever other relations he has, to go to the devil.”

“Shortlands,” said Mr. Winterbourne, angrily, “this is a serious thing ; it is not to be settled in your free and easy way. I suppose you wouldn’t mind bringing on Yolande the mortification of being jilted ? How could you explain to her ? She would be left—without a word. And I hear she is beginning to be anxious already. Poor child, whichever way it goes, she will have enough to suffer.”

“I should not mind so much which way it goes,” said John Shortlands, bluntly, “if only somebody would take the Master of Lynn by the scruff of the neck, and oblige me by kicking him from Allt-nam-ba Bridge to Foyers Pier.”

“Come, come,” said Melville (though he was by much the youngest of these three), “the less said in that way the better. What you want is to make the best of things ; not to stir up ill-will. For my part, I regard Miss Winterbourne’s engagement to Mr. Leslie as a secondary matter—at this present moment ; I consider her first duty is to her mother ; and I am pretty sure you will find that will be her opinion when you put the

facts of the case before her. Yes; I am pretty certain of that.”

“And who would undertake to tell her?” her father said. “Who could face the suffering, the shame, you would see in her eyes? Who would dare to suggest to her that she, so tenderly cared for all her life, should go away and encounter these horrors?”

There was silence.

“If it comes to that,” said Melville, slowly, “I will do it. If you think it right—if it will give you pain to speak to her—let me speak to her.”

“You?” said her father. “Why should you undertake what cannot but be a dreadful task? Why should you have to bear that?”

“Oh,” said he, “my share in the common trouble would be slight. Besides, I have not many friends; and when one has the chance of lending a hand, don’t you understand, it is a kind of gratification. I know it will not be pleasant—except for one thing. I am looking forward to her answer; and I know what it will be.”

“But, really,” her father said, with some hesitation, “is it fair we should put this on

you? It is a great sacrifice to ask from one who has been so recently our friend. You have seen her—you have seen how light-hearted she is; and to ask any one to go and take away the happy carelessness of her life from her——”

“Yes, it will make a change,” said Melville, thoughtfully. “I know that. She will be no longer a girl. She will be a woman.”

“At all events, Winterbourne,” John Shortlands broke in, “what I said before I say now—you are the last man to undertake such a job. You’d frighten the girl out of her senses. It’s bad enough as it is; and it’ll have to be told her by degrees. I would have a try myself; but I might say something about the cause of her having to be told; and that would only make mischief. If I said anything about your friend Leslie, Mr. Melville, I ask you to forget it. No use making rows. And I say, if Winterbourne decides on taking your way out of this troubrous business, and if you don’t mind doing what you’ve offered to do, you could not find a better time than next Tuesday, if that will be convenient for you, for we shall be all away

at the far tops that day, and I daresay it will take you some time to break the news gently.”

“I am quite at your service, either on Tuesday or any other day, whenever you let me know what you have decided.”

He would not go on to the house with them, despite all their solicitations; on the other hand, he begged them not to say to Yolande that they had seen him. So they went on their way down to the little lodge and its dependencies; while he went back and over the hills.

“He’s a damned fine fellow that, and no mistake,” said the plain-spoken John Shortlands. “There is a sort of broad human nature about him. And I should think, Winterbourne, you were very much obliged to him.”

“Obliged?” said Yolande’s father. “It is scarcely the word.”

CHAPTER XIII.

CONTRITION.

MRS. GRAHAM, attended by her maid, and dressed in one of the most striking of her costumes, was slowly pacing up and down the loud-echoing railway-station at Inverness. This was what her brother used spitefully to call her platform parade ; but on this occasion, at all events, she had no concern about what effect, if any, her undoubtedly distinguished appearance might produce. She was obviously deeply preoccupied. Several times she stopped at the book-stall, and absently glanced at the titles of the various journals ; and, indeed, when at length she purchased one or two papers, she forgot to take up the change, and had to be called back by the pretty young lady behind the counter. Then she glanced at the clock, handed the newspapers to her maid, and bade her wait there

for a few minutes ; and forthwith entered the Station Hotel.

She passed along the corridor, and went into the drawing-room. From that room she had a full view of the general reading-room, which forms the centre of the building, and is lit from the roof ; and the first glance showed her the person of whom she was in search. The Master of Lynn, the sole occupant of the place, was lying back in a cane-bottomed rocking-chair, turning over the pages of *Punch*.

“So I have found you at last. What are you doing here ?” she said—rather sharply.

He looked up.

“I might ask the same question of you,” he answered, with much coolness.

“You know well enough. It is not for nothing I have come all the way from Inverstroy.”

“You must have got up early,” he remarked.

“I want to know what you are doing here.”

“I am reading *Punch*.”

“Yes,” said she, with some bitterness ; “and I suppose your chief occupation is

playing billiards all day long with commercial travellers!"

"One might be worse employed."

"Archie, let us have none of this nonsense. What do you mean to do? Why don't you answer my letters?"

"Because you make too much of a fuss. Because you are too portentous. Now I like a quiet life. That is why I am here; I came here to have a little peace."

"Well, I don't understand you at all," his sister said, in a hopeless kind of way. "I could understand it better if you were one of those young men who are attracted by every pretty face they see, and are always in a simmering condition of love-making. But you are not like that. And I thought you were proud to think of Yolande as your future wife. I can remember one day on board the dahabeeah. You were anxious enough then. What has changed you?"

"I do not know that I am changed," said he, either with indifference or an affectation of indifference.

"Is *Shena Vän* in Inverness?" said Mrs. Graham, sharply.

“I suppose Miss Stewart has as good a right to be in Inverness as anybody else,” he said, formally.

“Do you mean to say you don’t know whether she is in Inverness or not?”

“I did not say anything of the kind.”

“Have you spoken to her?”

“Don’t keep on bothering,” he said, impatiently. “Miss Stewart is in Inverness; and, if you want to know, I have not spoken a single word to her. Is that enough?”

“Why are you here, then? What are you going to do?”

“Nothing.”

“Really this is too bad, Archie,” his sister said, in deep vexation. “You are throwing away the best prospects a young man ever had, and all for what! For temper!”

“I don’t call it temper at all,” said he. “I call it self-respect. I have told you already that I would not degrade Yolande Winterbourne so far as to plead for her being received by my family. A pretty idea!”

“There would have been no necessity to plead, if only you had exercised a little patience, and tact, and judgment. And surely

it is not too late yet. Just think how much pleasanter it would be for you, and for all of us, in the future if you were rather more on an equal footing with Jim—I mean as regards money. I don't see why you shouldn't have your clothes made at Poole's, as Jim has. Why shouldn't you have chamois-leather pockets in your overcoat as well as he?"

"I can do without chamois-leather pockets," he answered.

"Very well," said she, suddenly changing the mode of her attack, "but what you cannot do without is the reputation of having acted as a gentleman. You are bound in honour to keep faith with Yolande Winterbourne."

"I am bound in honour not to allow her to subject herself to insult," he retorted.

"Oh, there will be nothing of the kind!" his sister exclaimed. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"You don't know the worst of it," said he, gloomily. "I only got to know the other day. Yolande's mother is alive—an opium drinker. Off her head at times—kicks up rows in the streets—and they are helpless,

because they have all been in this conspiracy to keep it back from Yolande——”

“ You don’t mean that, Archie !” his sister exclaimed, looking very grave.

“ I do, though. And, you know, his lordship might in time be got to overlook the Radical papa, but a mamma who might at any moment figure in a police court—I think not even you could get him to stand that.”

“ But, Archie, this is dreadful !” Mrs. Graham exclaimed again.

“ I daresay it is. It is the fact, however.”

“ And that is why he was so anxious to get Yolande away from London,” she said, thoughtfully. “ Poor man, what a terrible life to lead !”

She was silent for some time ; she was reading the story more clearly now—his continual travelling with Yolande, his liking for long voyages, his wish that the girl should live in the Highlands after her marriage. And perhaps, also, his warm and obvious approval of that marriage ?—she knew that fathers with only daughters were not always so complaisant.

Two or three strangers came into the reading-room.

“Archie,” said she, waking up from a reverie, “let us go out for a stroll. I must think over this.”

He went and fetched his hat and stick ; and the maid having been directed to go into the hotel and await her mistress’s return, the brother and sister went outside and proceeded to walk leisurely through the bright and cheerful little town, in the direction of the harbour.

“What is your own view of the matter ?” she said, at length, and somewhat cautiously.

“Oh, my position is perfectly clear. I can have nothing to do with any such system of secrecy and terrorism. I told Jack Melville that when he came as a sort of ambassador. I said I would on no account whatever subject myself to such unnecessary risks and anxieties. My contention was that, first of all, the whole truth should be told to Yolande ; then if that woman keeps quiet, good and well ; if not, we can appeal to the law and have her forcibly confined. There is nothing more simple ; and I daresay it could be kept

out of the papers. But then, you see, my dear Miss Polly, there is also the possibility that it might get into the papers ; and if you add on this little possibility to what his lordship already thinks about the whole affair, you may guess what use all your beautiful persuasion and tact and conciliation would be."

"I don't see," said Mrs. Graham, slowly, "why papa should know anything about it. It does not concern him. Many families have ne'er-do-well or disreputable members ; and simply nothing is said about them ; and they are supposed not to exist. Friends of the family ignore them ; they are simply not mentioned, until in time they are forgotten altogether ; it is as if they did not exist. I don't see why papa should be told anything about it."

"Oh, I am for having everything straightforward," said he. "I don't wish to have anything thrown in my teeth afterwards. But the point isn't worth discussing in the present state of his lordship's temper ; and it isn't likely to be so long as that old cat is at his elbow. Well, now, that is what Mr. Winterbourne might fairly say. He might say we

had no right to object to his having a half-maniac wife in his family so long as we had an entirely maniac aunt—who is also a cantankerous old beast—in ours.”

“Archie, I must ask you to be more decent in your language!” his sister said, angrily. “Is that the way the young men talk at Balliol now?”

“I guess it’s the way they talk everywhere when they happen to have the luxury of having an Aunt Colquhoun as a relative.”

“My dear Master, you won’t go very far to put matters straight if you continue in that mood.”

“Am I anxious to go far to put matters straight?”

“You ought to be—for the sake of Miss Winterbourne,” said his sister, stiffly.

“No,” he answered; “it is they who ought to be—for the sake of Lynn.”

Well, she saw there was not much to be done with him just then; and, indeed, there was something in what he had told her that wanted thinking over. But in the meantime she was greatly relieved to find that he had not (as she had suspected) resumed any kind

of relations with Shena Ván ; and she was anxious above all things to get him away from Inverness.

“When are you going back to Lynn ?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered, carelessly.

“Now, do be sensible, Archie, and go down with me in this afternoon’s steamer. All this trouble will be removed in good time ; and you need not make the operation unnecessarily difficult. I am going down to Fort Augustus by the three o’clock boat ; you can come with me as far as Foyers.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” he said. “I have had a little peace and quiet ; I can afford to go back to the menagerie. Only there won’t be anybody to meet me at Foyers.”

“You can get a dog-cart from Mrs. Elder,” his sister said. “And if you were very nice, you would take me back to your hotel now, and give me some lunch, for I am frightfully hungry. Do you know at what hour I had to get up in order to catch the boat at Fort Augustus !”

“I don’t see why you did it.”

“No, perhaps not. But when you are as

old as I am, you will see with different eyes. You will see what chances you had at this moment, that you seem willing to let slip through your fingers ; and why ?—because you have not enough patience to withstand a little opposition. But you know perfectly well, when you asked Yolande Winterbourne to marry you, on board the *dahabeeah*, that papa might very probably have objections ; and you took the risk ; and now, when you find there are objections and opposition, I don't think it is quite fair for you to throw the whole thing up, and leave the girl deserted, and every one disappointed. And it all depends on yourself. You have only to be patient and conciliatory ; when they see that you are not to be affected by their opposition, they will give in, in time. And as soon as the people go away from Inverstroy, I will come over and help you."

He said nothing ; so they went back and had lunch at the hotel ; and in due time, Mrs. Graham's maid accompanying, they drove along to the Canal and got on board the little steamer. They had a beautiful sail down Loch Ness on this still, golden afternoon ;

but perhaps the picturesqueness of the scenery was a trifle familiar to them ; in fact, they regarded the noble loch mostly as an excellent highway for the easy transference of casks and hampers from Inverness, and their chief impression of the famous Falls of Foyers was as to the height of the hill that their horses had to climb in going and coming between Foyers and Lynn.

As they were slowly steaming in to Foyers Pier, pretty Mrs. Graham said—

“ I wonder if that can be Yolande herself in that dog-cart. Yes ; it is ; that is her white Rubens hat. Lucky, for you, Master ; if she gives you a lift, it will save you hiring.”

“ I don’t think,” said he, with a faint touch of scorn, “ that the mutual excess of courtesy which has been interchanged between Lynn Towers and Allt-nam-ba would warrant me in accepting such a favour. But the cat bows when she and Yolande pass. Oh yes, she does as much as that.”

“ And she will do a little more in time, if only you are reasonable,” said his sister, who still hoped that all would be well.

Young Leslie had merely a hand-bag with

him. When he left the steamer, he walked along the pier by himself until he reached the road, and there he found Yolande seated in the dog-cart. He went up and shook hands with her ; and she seemed very pleased to see him.

“ You are going to Lynn ? Shall I drive you out ? ”

“ No, thank you,” said he, somewhat stiffly. “ I will not trouble you. I can get a trap at the hotel.”

She looked surprised, and then, perhaps, a trifle reserved.

“ Oh, very well,” said she, with calm politeness. “ The hotel carriages have more room than this little one. Good-bye.”

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had no quarrel with her. She might be the indirect cause of all this trouble and confusion that had befallen him ; but she was certainly not the direct cause. She was in absolute ignorance of it, in fact. And so he lingered for a second ; and then he said, looking up—

“ You have no one coming by the steamer ? ”

“ Oh no,” she said ; but she did not renew the invitation—indeed, there was just a touch of coldness in her manner.

“If I thought I should not overload the dog-cart,” said he, rather shamefacedly, “I would beg of you to give me a seat. I understand the stag’s head has come down by this steamer. I saw it at Macleay’s this morning.”

“It is that I have come in for—that only,” she said. “There is plenty of room, if you wish.”

So, without more ado, he put his hand-bag into the dog-cart, behind ; and there also was deposited the stag’s head that Sandy was now bringing along from the steamer. Then, when the lad had gone to the horse’s head, Yolande got down ; for she always walked this steep hill, whether going or coming ; and, of course, no men-folk could remain in the vehicle when she was on foot. So she and the Master now set out together.

“I hope they have been having good sport at Allt-nam-ba,” he said.

“Oh yes.”

It was clear that his unaccountable refusal of her invitation had surprised her ; and her manner was distinctly reserved. Seeing that, he took the more pains to please her.

“Macleay has done the stag’s head very well,” said he; “and I have no doubt Mr. Shortlands will be proud of it. Pity it isn’t a royal; but still it is a good head. It is curious how people’s ideas change as they go on preserving stag’s heads. At first, it is everything they shoot, no matter what; and every head must be stuffed. Then they begin to find that expensive; and they take to boiling the heads, keeping only the skull and the horns. Then they begin to improve their collection by weeding out the second and third rate heads, which they give to their friends. And then, in the end, they are quite disappointed with anything short of a royal. I went in to Macleay’s a day or two ago, and asked him to push on with that head. I thought Mr. Shortlands would like to see how it looked hung up in the lodge; and I thought you might like to see it too.”

“It was very kind of you,” she said.

“Has the great hare drive come off?” he asked—and surely he was trying to be as pleasant as he could be. “Oh, I think you said it was to be to-morrow. I should like to have gone with them; but, to tell you

the truth, Yolande, I am a little bit ashamed. Your father has been too kind to me—that is the fact. Of course, if we had the forest in our own hands, it would not matter so much ; for your father then might have a return invitation to go for a day or two's deer-stalking. But with everything let, you see, I am helpless ; and your father's kindness to me has been almost embarrassing. Then there is another thing. My father and aunt are odd people. They live too much in seclusion ; they have got out of the way of entertaining friends, because, with the forest and the shooting always let, they could scarcely ask any one to come and live in such a remote place. It is a pity. Look at the other families in Inverness-shire ; look at Lord Lovat, look at Lord Seafield, look at The Mackintosh, and these ; they go out into the world ; they don't box themselves up in one place. But then we are poor folk—that is one reason, perhaps ; and my father has just one mania in his life—to improve the condition of Lynn ; and so he has not gone about, perhaps, as others might have done."

Now it sounded well in her ears that this

young man should be inclined to make excuses for his father, even when, as she suspected, the domestic relations at the Towers were somewhat strained ; and she instantly adopted a more friendly tone towards him.

“Ah,” said she, “what a misfortune yesterday ! The red shepherd came running in to say that there were some deer up the glen of the Allt Crôm ; and, of course, every one hurried away—my papa and Mr. Shortlands to two of the passes. What a misfortune, there being no one with the beaters. They came upon them—yes, a stag and four hinds, quite calmly standing and nibbling, and away—away—they went up the hill, not going near either of the guns. Was it not sad ?”

“Not for the deer.”

“And my papa not to have a stag’s head to take back as well as Mr. Shortlands !” she said, in great disappointment.

“Oh, but if you like he shall have a finer head to take back than any he would be likely to get in half-a-dozen years of those odd chances. I will give him one I shot—with three horns. I have always had a clear understanding about that : anything I shoot

is mine—it doesn't belong to the furniture of Lynn Towers. And I will give that head to your father, if you like ; it is a very remarkable one, I can assure you."

"That is kind of you," she said. They were on more friendly terms now ; she had forgiven him.

When they got to the summit of the hill, they got into the dog-cart, and descended the other side, and drove away through the wooded and rocky country. She seemed pleased to be on better terms with him ; and he, on his part, was particularly good-natured and friendly. But when they drew near to Gress she grew a little more thoughtful. She could not quite discard those hints she had received. Then her father's anxious trouble —Was that merely caused by the disagreement that had broken out between the Master and his relatives ? If that were all, matters would mend, surely. She, at all events, was willing to let time work his healing wonders ; she was in no hurry ; and certainly her pride was not deeply wounded. She rather liked the Master's excuses for those old people who lived so much out of the world. And she

was distinctly glad that now there was no suspicion of any coldness between herself and him.

There was no one visible at Gress ; and they drove on without stopping. When they arrived at the bridge, the Master got down to open the swinging iron gate, telling Sandy to keep his seat ; and it was not worth his while to get up again.

“Now,” said Yolande, brightly, “I hope you will change your mind and come along to-morrow morning to Allt-nam-ba and go with the gentlemen, after all. It is to be a great affair.”

“I will see if I can manage it,” said he, evasively ; and then they bade each other good-bye, and she drove on.

But although they had seen no one at Gress, Jack Melville had seen them. He was far up the hillside, seated on some bracken among the rocks ; and his elbows were on his knees, and his head resting on his hands. He had gone away up there to be perfectly alone—to think over all that he was to say to Yolande on the next day. It was a terrible task ; and he knew it.

He saw them drive by ; and his heart had a great pity for this girl.

“The evening is coming over the sky now,” he was thinking, as he looked around, “and she has left behind her the last of the light-hearted days of her life.”

CHAPTER XIV.

FABULA NARRATUR.

EARLY next morning (for he was anxious to get this painful thing over) he walked slowly and thoughtfully up to Allt-nam-ba. He knew she was at home ; for the dog-cart had gone by with only Sandy in it. Perhaps she might be indoors—working at the microscope he had lent her, or arranging her plants.

She had seen him come up the strath ; she was at the door awaiting him, her face radiant.

“ Ah, but why are you so late ? ” she cried. “ They are all away. Shepherds and gillies and all, two hours ago.”

“ I did not mean to go with them. I have come to have a chat with you, Yolande, if you will let me.”

He spoke carelessly ; but there was something in his look that she noticed ; and when she had preceded him into the little drawing-room, she turned and regarded him.

“What is it? Is it serious?” she said, scanning his face.

Well, he had carefully planned how he would approach the subject; but at this moment all his elaborate designs went clean away from his brain. A far more happy expedient than any he had thought of had that instant occurred to him. He would tell her this story as of some one else.

“It is serious in a way,” said he, “for I am troubled about an unfortunate plight that a friend of mine is in. Why should I bother you about it?—but still, you might give me your advice.”

“My advice?” she said. “If it would be of any service to you, yes, yes! But how could it be? What experience of the world have I had?”

“It isn’t a question of experience of the world; it is a question of human nature mostly,” said he. “And this friend of mine is a girl just about your own age. You might tell me what you would do in the same circumstances.”

“But I might do something very foolish.”

“I only want to know what you would

naturally feel inclined to do. That is the question. You could easily tell me that ; and I could not find it out for myself—no, not if I were to set all my electric machines going."

"Ah, well, I will listen very patiently, if I am to be the judge," said she. "And I am glad it is not anything worse. I thought when you came in it was something very serious."

He did not wish to be too serious ; and, indeed, he managed to tell her the whole story in a fashion so plain, matter-of-fact, and unconcerned, that she never for an instant dreamed of its referring to herself. Of course he left out all details and circumstances that might positively have given her a clue, and only described the central situation as between mother and daughter. And Yolande had a great compassion for that poor, debased woman ; and some pity, too, for the girl who was kept in ignorance of her mother being alive ; and she sat with her hands clasped on her knees, regarding these two imaginary figures, as it were, and too much interested in them to remember that her counsel was being asked concerning them.

“Now, you see, Yolande,” he continued, “it appears that one of the results of using those damnable—I beg your pardon—I really beg your pardon—I mean those—those poisonous drugs, is that the will entirely goes. The poor wretches have no command over themselves; they live in a dream; they will promise anything—they will make the most solemn vows of abstinence—and be quite unable to resist the temptation. And the law practically puts no check on the use of these fiendish things; even when the public-houses are closed the chemist’s shop is open. Now, Yolande, I have a kind of theory or project with regard to that poor woman—I don’t know whether the doctors would approve of it—but it is a fancy I have: let us suppose that that poor wretch of a mother does not quite understand that her daughter has grown up to be a woman—most likely she still regards her as a child—that is a very common thing—at all events, she is not likely to know anything as to what her daughter is like. And suppose that this daughter were to go to her mother and declare herself: do you not think that that would be enough to startle

her out of her dream ; and do you not think that in the bewilderment of finding their relations reversed—the child grown to be a woman assuming a kind of protection and authority and command over the broken-down creature—she might be got to rely on that help, and, encouraged and strengthened by constant care and affection, to retrieve herself ? Don't you think it is possible ? To be startled out of that dream by shame and horror ; then the wonder of having that beautiful daughter her champion and protectress ; then the continual reward of her companionship : don't you think it is possible ? ”

“ Oh yes—oh yes, surely ! ” said the girl.
“ Surely you are right ! ”

“ But then, Yolande, I am afraid you don't understand what a terrible business it will be. It will demand the most constant watchfulness ; for these drugs are easy to get ; and people who use them are very cunning. And it will require a long time—perhaps years—before one could be certain that the woman was saved. Now look at it from the other side. Might not one say, ‘ That poor woman's life is gone, is done for : why should

you destroy this other young life in trying to save a wreck? Why should you destroy one happy human existence in trying to rescue the mere remnant of another human existence that would be worthless and useless even if you succeed? Why should not the girl live her own life in peace and happiness? ” ”

“ But that is not what you would say; that is not what you think,” she said, confidently. “ And do you ask what the girl would think?—for I can tell you that. Oh yes, I can tell you—she would despise any one who offered her such a choice! ”

“ But she would be in ignorance, Yolande; she would know nothing about it.”

“ She ought not to be in ignorance, then! Why do they not tell her? Why not ask herself what she will do? Ah, and all this time the poor woman left to herself—it was not right—it was not just! ”

“ But she has not been left to herself, Yolande. Everything has been tried—everything but this. And that is why I have come to ask you what you think a girl in that position would naturally do. What would she do if she were told? ”

“There cannot be a doubt,” she exclaimed. “Oh, there cannot be a doubt!—You—I know what your feeling is—what your opinion is. And yet you hesitate? Why? Go; and you will see what her answer will be!”

“Do you mean to say, Yolande,” he said, deliberately, and regarding her at the same time, “that you have no doubt whatever? You say I am to go and ask this young girl to sacrifice her life—or it may be only a part, but that the best part, of her life—on this chance of rescuing a poor broken-down creature——”

“*Her mother*,” said Yolande.

“What will she think of me, I wonder,” he said, absently.

The answer was decisive.

“If she is the girl that you say, oh, I know how she will be grateful to you. She will bless you. She will look on you as the best and dearest of her friends, who had courage when the others were afraid, who had faith in her.”

“Yolande,” said he, almost solemnly, “you have decided for yourself.”

“I?” she said, in amazement.

“Your mother is alive.”

She uttered a sharp cry — of pain, it seemed.

“ My mother—my mother—*like that!* ”

For a time this agony of shame and horror deprived her of all power of utterance ; the blow had fallen heavily. Her most cherished and beautiful ideals lay broken at her feet ; in their place was this stern and ghastly picture that he had placed before her mental eyes. He had not softened down any of the details ; it was necessary that she should know the truth. And she had been so much interested in the story, as he patiently put it before her, that now she had but little difficulty—alas ! she had no difficulty at all—in placing herself in the position of that imaginary daughter, and realising what she had to face.

He waited. He had faith in her courage ; but he would give her time. This was a sudden thing to happen to a girl of nineteen.

“ Well,” she said, at length, in a low voice, “ I will go.”

Her hands were tightly clenched together ; but she showed no symptom of faltering. Presently she said, in the same steady, constrained way—

“I will go at once. Does papa know you were coming here to-day to tell me?”

“Yes. He could not do it himself, Yolande. He has suffered fearfully during these long years in order to hide this from you; he thought it would only pain you to know—that you could do no good.”

“What induced him to change his mind?”

He was embarrassed; he had not expected the question. She glanced at his face.

“Was that the objection at Lynn Towers?” she said, calmly.

“No, Yolande, no; it was not. I dare-say Lord Lynn does not quite approve of your father’s politics; but that has nothing to do with you.”

“Then it was your idea that I should be told?”

“Well,” said he, uneasily, “possibly your father imagined that Archie Leslie might not like—might think he had been unfairly treated if he were not told—and then, I was his friend, don’t you see, and they mentioned the matter to me—and—and—being an outsider, I was reluctant to interfere at first—but then, when they spoke of telling you,

I said to myself that I knew, or I fancied I knew, what a girl like Yolande Winterbourne would be sure to do in such circumstances—and so I thought I would venture the suggestion to them, and—and, if it turned out to be so, then I might be of some little help to you."

That was cleverly done; he had not told her it was the Master of Lynn who had insisted on that disclosure.

And now she was gathering her courage to her; though still she maintained a curious sort of constrained reserve, as though she were keeping a tight hold over her feelings.

"I suppose," she said, slowly, "it is your idea I should go there—alone."

"If you are not afraid, Yolande,—if you are not afraid!" he said, anxiously.

"I am not afraid."

"Don't you see, Yolande," he said, eagerly, "if you go accompanied by a stranger, she may think it is a solicitor—people in that weak mental state are usually suspicious; and if you go with your father, she would probably only consider it a repetition of former interviews, that came to nothing. No; it is the sudden appearance of her

daughter that will startle her into consciousness of what she is. Then don't mind those people she is with. Don't be afraid of them. They dare not detain her. You will have a policeman waiting outside ; and your maid will go into the house with you, and wait in the passage. You will have to assume authority. Your mother may be a bit dazed. poor woman ; you must take her with you ; let no one interfere. Now, do you think you have nerve for that—all by yourself?"

"Oh yes, I think so," she said, calmly. "But I must begin at the beginning. I cannot leave the lodge without putting some one in charge——"

"I will send up Mrs. Bell—she will be delighted."

"Ah, will you?" she said, with a quick glance of gratitude breaking through her forced composure. "If only she would be so kind as to do that! She knows everything that is wanted——"

"Don't trouble yourself about that for a moment," he said. "Mrs. Bell will be delighted—there is nothing she would not do for you."

“Then I must take away my things with me ; perhaps I shall not see Allt-nam-ba again ; my life will be altered now. Where do I go when I reach London ?”

“I should say the hotel your father and you were at once or twice, in Albemarle Street. But are you sure, Yolande, you would rather not have some one go with you to London, and see you to your quarters in the hotel ? Why, I would myself—with pleasure ; for my assistant Dálrymple gets on very well in the school now. Or Mr. Shortlands, he is going south soon, is he not ? I would not ask your father ; it would be too painful for him.”

“No,” she said, “I do not want any one. Jane and I will do very well. Besides I could not wait for Mr. Shortlands. I am going at once.”

“At once ! Surely you will take time to consider——”

“I am going to-morrow,” she said, “if Mrs. Bell will be so kind as to come and take my place.”

“Don’t be so precipitate, Yolande,” he said, with some anxiety. “I have put all

this before you for your consideration ; and I should feel I was burdened with a terrible responsibility if you were to do anything you might afterwards regret. Will you consult Mr. Shortlands ?”

She shook her head.

“ Will you take a week to think over it ?”

“ No ; why ?” she said, simply. “ Did I not consider when you were telling me the story of this imaginary girl ? Had I any doubt ? No. I knew what she would decide. I know what I have decided. What use is there in delay ? Ah, if there is to be the good come out of it that you have imagined for me, should I not haste ? When one is perishing, you do not think twice if you can hold out your hand. Do you think that I regret—that I am sorry to leave a little comfort behind—that I am afraid to take a little trouble ? Surely you do not think that of me. Why I am anxious to go now is to see at once what can be done—to know the worst or the best—to try. And now—I shall not be speaking to my papa about it ; that would only give pain—will

you tell me what I should do, in all the small particulars? I am not likely to forget."

That he could do easily; for he had thought enough over the matter. He gave her the most minute instructions; guarding against this or that possibility; and she listened mutely and attentively, with scarcely the interruption of a question. Then at length, he rose to say good-bye; and she rose too. He did not notice that, as she did so, her lips quivered for the briefest second.

He hesitated.

"If you are going to-morrow, Yolande," said he, "I will see you as you pass. I will look out for you. I should like to say good-bye to you; it may be for a long time."

"It may, for always," she said, with her eyes cast down; "perhaps I shall never be back here again."

"And I am sending you away into all this trouble and grief. How can I help knowing that it is I who am doing it? And perhaps, day after day, and night after night, I shall be trying to justify myself—when I am thinking over it, and wondering where you are; and perhaps I shall not succeed very well."

“But it is I who justify you—that is enough,” she said, in a low voice. “Did I not decide for myself? And I know that in your heart you think I am doing right; and if you are afraid for me—well, that is only kindness—such as that you have always shown to me——”

Here she stopped; and he did not see that her hands were clenched firm, as she stood there opposite him, with her eyes cast down.

“And whatever happens. Yolande—you may be in pain and grief—and perhaps all you may endure may only end in bitter disappointment—well, I hope you will not imagine that I came to you with my proposal unthinkingly. I have thought over it night and day. I did not come to you offhand——”

“Ah, then,” she said quickly, “and you think it is necessary to justify yourself—you, to me, as if I did not know you as well as I know myself! Do you think I do not know you and understand you because I am only a girl?” Her forced composure was breaking down altogether, she was trembling some-

what, and now there were tears running down her cheeks, despite herself; though she regarded him bravely, as if she would not acknowledge that. “And you asked me what the girl you spoke of would think of the man who came to her and showed her what she should do? Did I not answer? I said she would know then that he was the one who had faith in her; that she would give him her gratitude; that she would know who was her best and truest friend. And now, just as you and I are about to say good-bye, perhaps for ever, you think it is necessary for you to justify yourself to me—you, my best friend—my more than friend——”

And then—ah, who can tell how such things happen, or which is to bear the blame? —his arms were round her trembling figure, and she was sobbing violently on his breast. And what was this wild thing she said in the bewilderment of her grief—“Oh, why, why was my life given away before I ever saw you?”

“Yolande,” said he, with his face very pale, “I am going to say something, for this is our last meeting. What can a few words

matter—my darling!—if we are never to see each other again? I love you. I shall love you while I have life. Why should I not say it, for this once? I blinded myself; I tried to think it friendship—friendship, and the world was just filled with light whenever I saw you! It is our last meeting; you will let me say this for once—how can it harm you?"

She shrank out of his embrace; she sank down on the couch there, and turned away her head and hid her face in her hands.

"Go, go!" she murmured. "What have I done? For pity's sake go—and forget! Forget!"

He knelt down by the side of the couch; and he was paler than ever now.

"Yolande, it is for you to forget—and forgive. I have been a traitor to my friend; I have been a traitor to you. You shall never see me again. God bless you!—and good-bye!"

He kissed her hair, and rose, and got himself out of the house. As he went down that wide strath, his eyes fixed on nothing, like one demented, and his mind whirling

this way and that amid clouds of remorse and reproach and immeasurable pity—it seemed to him that he felt on his brow the weight of the brand of Cain.

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARATIONS.

AND as for her: she was stunned almost into unconsciousness by this shock of self-abasement and distress. She lay on the sofa, her face covered with her hands; she could not face the light. What was she then?—she who hitherto had been so fearless and so proud. A flirt, a jilt, a light-o'-love—that was how she saw herself; and then there was a kind of despair over the misery she had wrought, and a yearning to have him back to implore his pity and his forgiveness; and then sudden resolves to free herself in another direction, at any cost of penitence and humiliation. She began to compose hurried brief messages—though the throbbing brain and the shame-stricken soul could scarce decide between the fitness of them. These were some of them:—

“Dear Papa—I have gone away. Tell Archie not to think any more about me.—Yolande.”

And then again :—

“Dear Archie—I send you back the engagement-ring; I am not worthy to be your wife. I am sorry if I have caused you any disappointment; but you have less to regret than I have.”

And then again—to one not named at all :—

“To-day I go away. Never think of me again, or of what has happened. Forgive me; that is all.”

And then she began to think—if this wild torture of suggestions could be called thinking—of the undertaking that lay before her; and the thought of it was something of a relief. There would be an occupation, urgent, continuous, demanding all her attention; in time, and in a measure, she might school herself to forget. Perhaps, if this duty turned out to be a very sad and painful one, it might be taken by those whom she had wronged as a sort of penance? She was

prepared to suffer. She thought she deserved to suffer. Had she not proved a traitor to the man whom she had promised to marry? Had she not brought misery to this best and dearest of all her friends—to this fine and noble nature that she had learned to know; and that by her idleness and carelessness—the carelessness of a vain coquette and light-o'-love, heedless of consequences? What would he think of her? She could only vaguely recall the reproaches he had heaped upon himself; but she knew that he was in distress, and that she was the cause of it. And, perhaps, if there were trials in store for her, if there were suffering in store for her, perhaps he would never know that she rather welcomed that, and was content to receive her punishment? Perhaps he would never know how grieved she was? It was over and done, and past recall. And she knew that henceforth her life would be quite different to her.

How long she lay there in that misery of remorse and despair she probably never knew; but at last she forced herself to rise. She was not thinking of her appearance; she

did not know that her face was haggard and pale ; that an expression never before there was there now ; that her eyes were no longer the eyes of a child. She was going away—this was all she was compelling herself to think about ; and there were preparations to be made. And so in a slow and mechanical fashion she began to put a few things together even in this drawing-room ; although every other minute her heart seemed to stand still as she came upon some little trifle that was associated with him—something he had done for her, something that he had brought her, showing his continued solicitude and thoughtfulness and affection. Why had she not seen ? Why did she not understand ? And then she began to think of the evenings he had spent at the house, and of the walks they had had together down the wide valley ; and she began to know why it was that these evenings had seemed so rich in happy human sympathies, and why the valley had appeared so wondrous and beautiful, and why her life at Allt-nam-ba had had so strange and unnameable a charm thrown over it. And he—he had been blind, too. She knew that he

could not have imagined it possible that he was betraying his friend ; otherwise he would have fled from the place. She was standing quite still now, her eyes distraught ; and she was trying to recall the very tones in which he had said “I love you.” That was the misery of it ; and the cause of her shame ; and the just reason for her remorse and self-abasement ; and yet—and yet—somewhere or other deep down in her heart there was a curious touch of pride that she had heard those words. If circumstances had been different—to be approved, to have won the affection, to be loved by one like that ! And then a passion of self-contempt seized her ; and she said to herself : “ You, to think yourself worthy of such a love ! You, who can allow yourself to think of such things, with that ring on your finger ! ”

This also was strange, that, amid all the preparations for departure that she was now mechanically making, she should be possessed by a singular anxiety that Mrs. Bell, when she came to Allt-nam-ba, should find the household arrangements in the most perfect order. Had she some vague hope or fancy,

then, that some day or other, when she should be far enough away from Allt-nam-ba, and Gress, and Lynn, and not likely to see any one of them again, her name might be mentioned casually by this good woman, and mentioned, perhaps, with some slight word of approval? When she drew out, for Mrs. Bell's guidance, a list of her arrangements with the Inverness tradesmen, she was dissatisfied with the mere handwriting of it (for, indeed, her fingers trembled somewhat), and she destroyed it and wrote out another; and that she destroyed, and wrote out another—until the handwriting was fairly clear and correct.

Her maid Jane was a fool of a woman; but even she could see that her young mistress was faint-looking, and even ill-looking; and again and again she besought her to desist from these preparations, and to go and have some lunch, which awaited her in the dining-room.

“ You know, Miss,” said she, “ you can’t go before your papa comes home; and then it would be far too late to catch the steamer. You can’t go before the morning; and I am

sure, Miss, you will be quite ill and unable to travel if you don't eat something."

Well, Yolande went into the dining-room, and sat down at the table; but she could not eat or drink anything; and in a minute or two she was back again in her bedroom superintending the packing of her trunks. However, she was in time compelled to desist. The mental agitation of the morning, combined with this want of food, produced the natural result; she gradually acquired a violent headache, a headache so violent that further superintendence of packing or anything else was entirely out of the question. Now it was the literal fact that she had never had a headache in her life—except once, at the Château, when a large volume she was reaching for in the library fell and struck her—and she did not know what to do; but she fancied that by tying a wet towel round her head she might lessen the throbbing of the temples; and this she did, lying down the while. Jane stole out of the room, fancying her young mistress might now get some sleep. The girl was not thinking of sleep.

Mr. Winterbourne and John Shortlands were on their way back from the hill.

“I scarcely know what has happened to-day,” Mr. Winterbourne was saying. “All the time I have been thinking of our going back. And I know what I shall find when I go back—the wreck of the happiness that I have so carefully nursed all through these years. It is like hedging round a garden ; and growing flowers there ; and all at once, some morning, you find the place trampled down and a wilderness. I hope I am not unjust, Shortlands ; but I think he might have spared her.”

“Who ?”

“Young Leslie. I think he might have spared her. It was not much. Don’t you think—out of consideration——”

“Nonsense, man. What young Leslie has done seems to me, on reflection, perfectly just, and right, and reasonable,” said John Shortlands, telling a lie in the calmest manner possible. “The young people ought not to be hampered in starting life. A little trouble now—what is that ? And it will be better for you too, Winterbourne. You would have

kept on worrying yourself. You would have been always apprehensive about something. You would have reproached yourself for not telling him.”

“I am not thinking of myself,” Yolande’s father said, rather wistfully. “I could have borne all that; I am used to it. It is about her I am thinking. I remember in Egypt, away up at that still place, wondering whether all her life might not be just as quiet and uneventful and happy as it was there.”

“The fact is, Winterbourne,” said John Shortlands, bluntly, “you are just mad about that child of yours; and you expect the world to be changed all on her account; whereas every reasonable being knows that she must take her chance of trouble as well as others. And this—what is this? Is it so great an affair? You don’t know yet whether she will follow out that suggestion of Melville’s. Perhaps she won’t. If you would rather she should not, no doubt she will abide by your wishes. By this time she has been told. The secret is at an end. Leslie has had what he wanted; what the devil more can he ask for?”

But the sharp asperity of this last phrase rather betrayed his private opinion ; and so he added, quickly—

“ However, as you say, she is more likely to go. Well, why not look at the brighter side of things ? There is a possibility. Oh, you needn’t shake your head ; when I look at the whole thing from Melville’s point of view, I can see the possibility. He’s a devilish long-headed fellow, that ; and a devilish fine fellow, too ; not many men would have bothered their heads as he has done. I wouldn’t. If you and I weren’t old friends, do you think I would have interfered ? I’d have let you go on your own way. But now, old chap, I think you’ll find Yolande ready to go ; and you’d better not make too much fuss about it, and frighten the girl. I shall be in London ; I shall see she has plenty of money.”

“ It seems so inhuman,” her father said, absently.

“ What ? ”

“ That I should remain here shooting ; and she allowed to go away there, alone.”

“ My dear fellow, she’ll get on twenty

times better without ye," said Shortlands, plainly. "It seems to me that what you say Melville pointed out to you was just the perfection of good advice; you'll do well to abide by it."

"But he does not know Yolande as I do," her father said.

"He seems to have made a thundering good guess, anyway!"

"I don't mean that. He does not know how she has been brought up—always looked after and cared for. She has never been allowed to shift about for herself. Oh, as regards herself, I can see well enough that he imagines she has certain qualities; and perhaps he thinks it rather fine to make experiments. Well, I don't. I don't see why Yolande should be made the victim of any experiment; I am content with her as she is."

"You'd better see what she says about it herself."

When they reached the lodge, Yolande was not, as usual, standing in the porch to welcome them home from the hill.

"Please, sir," said the maid, "Miss

Winterbourne has a headache, and says would you excuse her coming down to dinner?"

He stood irresolute for a second or two—obviously greatly disturbed; then he slowly and thoughtfully went up the stairs, and gently knocked at the door of her room.

"May I come in, Yolande?"

She had just time to untie the wet towel from her head, to smooth her hair, and sit up in bed.

"Yes, papa."

He entered, went over and drew a chair near to her and sat down.

"I am sorry for you, Yolande," he said, in a low voice; and his eyes were nervously bent on the ground.

"Why, papa?"

She spoke in quite a cheerful way; and as he had not suffered his eyes to meet hers, he was unaware how that cheerfulness was belied by the strange expression in them. She was forcing herself to make light of this matter; she would not have him troubled. And perhaps, indeed, to her this was in truth a light matter, as compared with that tragic

disclosure and its consequences, which seemed to have cut away from her, at once and for ever, the shining and rose-coloured years of her youth.

“If I erred, Yolande,” said he, “in keeping all this back from you, I did it for the best.”

“Do you need to say that to me, papa?” she answered, with some touch of reproach.

“I thought it would save you needless pain,” said he; and then, as he ventured to lift his eyes, he caught sight of the pale anguish-stricken face, and he nearly cried aloud in his sudden alarm, “Yolande, are you ill?”

“Oh no, papa,” she said; and she did try her best to look very cheerful. “I have a headache—that is all; and it is not so bad as it was. I—I—have been seeing things packed, and making arrangements.”

“You are going, Yolande?” he said, with a sinking of the heart.

“That, again, it is unnecessary for you to ask me,” the girl said, simply.

“But not at once, Yolande?” said he, glancing at an open trunk. “Not at once?”

"To-morrow morning, papa," she answered. "Oh, but I assure you, you will be put to no trouble—no trouble at all. Mrs. Bell is coming from Gress to see everything right. And I have made out lists for her ; it is all arranged ; you will not know any difference——"

"Yolande, you will make me angry if you talk like that. What signifies our comfort ? It is the notion of your going away by yourself——"

"Jane goes with me. That is all arranged also," she said. "I have no fear."

"Listen, now, Yolande. I don't disapprove of your going. We have tried everything, and failed ; if there is a chance of your succeeding—well, perhaps one might say it is your duty to go. Poor child, I would rather have had you know nothing about it ; but that is all over now. Well, you see, Yolande, if you go, there must be no unnecessary risk or trouble about your going. I have been thinking that perhaps Mr. Melville may be a little too imaginative. He sees things strongly. And in insisting that you should go alone—why, there may be a danger that

he has been carried away by a—by a—well, I don't know how to put it, except that he may be so anxious to have this striking appeal made to your poor mother as to be indifferent to ordinary precautions. Why should you go friendless and alone? Why should I remain amusing myself here?"

"Because you would be of no use to me, papa," said she, calmly. "I know what I have to do."

"Why, then, should you not wait for a few days and travel south with Mr. Shortlands?"

"Oh, I must go at once, papa—at once?" she exclaimed. "I must go to-morrow. And Jane goes with me! Is it not simple enough?"

"Yolande, you cannot be left in London with absolutely no one to whom you can appeal. The least you must do is to take a letter to Lawrence and Lang. They will do anything you want; they will let you have what you want; if there is any hiring of lodgings or anything of that kind, they will send one of their clerks. You cannot be stranded in London without the chance of assistance. You must go to Lawrence and Lang."

"I may have to go to them—that also is arranged. But they must not interfere—they must not come with me—that was not Mr. Melville's idea," she said; though the pale face turned still paler as she forced herself to utter the name.

"Mr. Melville!" he said, angrily. "You seem to think the whole wisdom of the world is centred in Mr. Melville! I don't at all know that he was right in coming to put all this trouble on you. Perhaps he would not have been so quick if it had been his own sister, or his own daughter——"

Then a strange thing occurred. She had flung herself down on the pillow again, her face buried, her whole frame shaken by the sudden violence of her crying.

"Don't—don't—don't!" she sobbed, pitifully. "Don't speak like that, papa! There is enough trouble—there is enough!"

"What is it, Yolande?" said he. "Well, no wonder your nerves have been upset. I wonder you have taken it so bravely. I will leave you now, Yolande; but you must try and come down to dinner."

Dinner was put on the table; but she did

not make her appearance. A message was sent up to her; the answer was that she merely wished to have a cup of tea by and by. Jane, on being questioned, said that everything had been got ready for their departure the following morning; even to the ordering of the dog-cart for a particular hour.

“Yes,” her father said to John Shortlands, as they sat rather silently at the dinner-table, “she seems bent on going at once. Perhaps it is because she is nervous and anxious, and wants to know the worst. She won’t have any one with her; she is determined to keep to Melville’s plan; though I wanted her to wait and go south with you. What a dreadful thing it would be if any harm were to befall her——”

“Why, what harm can befall her?” his friend said. “What is the journey to London? —nothing! She gets into the train at Inverness to-morrow at midday: the next morning she is in London. Then a cab takes her to the hotel: what more simple? The real risk begins after that; and it is then that your friend Melville insists that she should take the thing into her own hands. Well, dang

me, if I'm afraid of the consequences. There's good grit in her. She hasn't had her nerve destroyed as you have. When the cob was scampering all over the place yesterday, and the groom couldn't get hold of him, did she run into the house? Not much. She waylaid him at the end of the bothy; and got hold of him herself, and led him to the stable-door. I don't think the lass has a bad temper; but I shouldn't like to be the one to put a finger on her against her will. Don't you fear. I can see where the bit of trouble, if there is to be any at all, will most likely come in; and I am not afraid. It's wonderful what women will do—ay, and weak women, too—in defence of those who have a claim on their affection. Talk about the tigress and her young; a woman's twice as bad, or twice as good, if you take it that way. I fancy some o' those poor devils of School Board inspectors must have a baddish time of it occasionally—I don't envy them. I tell you you needn't be afraid, my good fellow. Yolande will be able to take care of herself. And I think Jack Melville has put her on to doing the right thing, whatever comes of it."

Yolande did not appear that night ; she was too much distracted by her own thoughts ; she did not wish to be confronted with questioning eyes. But she found time to write this brief note :—

“ Tuesday night.

“ DEAR MR. SHORTLANDS—As it is not likely I shall see you in the morning, for I am going away at a very early hour, I leave you this word of good-bye. And please, *please*, stay with papa as long as ever you conveniently can. Duncan assures me that it is now you will be beginning to have chances with the red-deer.—Yours affectionately,

“ YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE.”

And as to that other—the friend who was sending her forth on this mission—was she going away without one word of good-bye for him ? She considered that, and did not sleep much that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

“IHR MATTEN, LEBT WOHL!”

THE first pale clear glow of the dawn was just beginning to tell on the higher slopes of the hills when she arose; and all the house was asleep. The heart-searching of that long night had calmed her somewhat. Now she was chiefly anxious to get away—to seek forgetfulness of this sad discovery in the immediate duty that lay before her. And if sometimes the fear was forced upon her that neither for him nor for her was forgetfulness possible—well, it was not her own share of that suffering that she regarded with dismay. Nay, did she not rather welcome that as a punishment which she deserved—as a penance which might be counted to her in the due course of years? If this passage in her life was not to be obliterated, at least, and in the meantime, she would endeavour to close the chapter. She was going away from Allt-nam-

ba ; and from the mistakes and miseries that had happened there. A new era in her life was opening before her ; perhaps she would have less to reproach herself with in that.

In the silence of this pale clear morning she sat down and quickly wrote still another message of farewell, the terms of which she had carefully (and not without some smitings of conscience) studied during the long wakeful hours :—

“ Allt-nam-ba, Wednesday morning.

“ DEAR ARCHIE—A grave duty calls me suddenly away to the south. No doubt you can guess what it is ; and you will understand how, in the meantime at least, all our other plans and arrangements must yield to it. Probably, as I am anxious to catch the early boat at Foyers, I may not see you to say good-bye ; and so I send you this message.—From your affectionate

“ YOLANDE.”

She regarded this letter with much self-humiliation. It was not frank. Perhaps she had no right to write to him so, without telling him of what had happened the day before.

And yet again, what time was there now for explanation ; and perhaps, as the days, and the months, and the years went by, there might never be need of any explanation ? Her life was to be all different now.

The household began to stir. There was a crackling of wood in the kitchen ; outside Sandy could be heard opening the doors of the coach-house. Then Jane put in an appearance, to finally close her young mistress's portmanteaus. And then, everything having been got ready, when she went down-stairs to the dining-room, she was surprised to find her father there.

"Why did you get up so early," said she, in protest.

"Do you think I was going to let you leave without saying good-bye ?" he answered. " You are looking a little better this morning, Yolande—but not well, not well. Are you sure you won't reconsider ? Will you not wait a few days ; accustom yourself to think of it ; and then go, if you will go, with Mr. Shortlands ?"

"Oh no, that is all over, papa," said she. "That is all settled. I am going this morning—now——"

“Now? Already?” he exclaimed.

“I wish to have a little time at Gress,” she answered, calmly, “to explain all the arrangements to Mrs. Bell.”

But he compelled her to sit down and have some hasty breakfast; while he remained at the window, anxious, disturbed, and yet for the most part silent. There was no doubt he regarded her going with an undefined dread; but he saw that it was no use to try to dissuade her—her purpose being so obviously settled and clear. There was another thing; he showed the greatest embarrassment in talking in any way whatever about the subject. He could not bring himself to mention his wife’s name. To Yolande he had said “your poor mother”—but only once. He seemed unable to make this thing that he had hidden from her for so many years a topic of conversation.

And it was almost in silence, and with a face overshadowed with gloom, that he saw the last preparations made. He followed her out to the dog-cart. He himself would fasten the rugs round her knees—the morning being somewhat chilly. And when they drove away, he stood there for a long time regard-

ing them ; until the dog-cart disappeared at a turning of the road, and Yolande was gone. This, then, was the end of that peaceful security that he had hoped to find at Alltnam-ba !

Yolande was not driving this morning ; she had too many things to think of. But when they reached the bridge at the lower end of the loch, she told Sandy to stop, and took the reins.

"Here is a letter for Mr. Leslie," she said. "You need not take it up to the house ; put it in the letter-box at the gate."

Then they drove on again. When they had climbed the hill, she looked over to Lynn Towers ; but she could not make out any one at any of the windows. There were one or two stable-lads about the outhouses, but otherwise no sign of life. She was rather glad of that.

When she got to Gress, she saw that Mrs. Bell was in the garden behind the house, and thither she made her way. Yolande's face was pale ; but her manner was quite calm and firm.

"Well, here are doings !" said the cheerful

old lady. "And I was just hurrying on to get a few bit flowers for ye. 'Deed, ye're early this morning."

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Bell; but please do not trouble. You expected me, then? Mr.—Mr. Melville told you?"

"That he did. And I'll just be delighted to be of any kind of service to ye that is possible. I'll be ready to go up to Allt-nam-ba by mid-day; and I'm thinking I'll take one o' the young lassies wi' me, in case there's any needcessity for a helping hand. The other one will do very well to look after this place when both Mr. Melville and me are away."

"But is he going? Is he going away?" said Yolande, with a sudden alarm.

"I think he is; though it's no my place to ask," said Mrs. Bell, placidly. "Last night I saw he was putting some things in order, in the house. And I jalouse he stopped in the laboratory the whole night through, for he never was in his bed; and this morning I caught a glint o' him going out before any o' us was up. I daresay he was off to one o' the moorland lochs, to have a last day at the trout belike."

“He is not here, then?” the girl exclaimed, with dismay in her eyes. “Mrs. Bell, I must see him! Indeed, I cannot go until I have seen him!”

“Wha kens where he may be now?” said the old lady, good-humouredly (for she clearly had no idea that there was anything tragic occurring around her). “There never was such a man for wandering about the country like a warlock. Many a fright has he gi’en the shepherds, when they came upon him in the corries that no ordinary Christian ever goes near.”

“But you must send for him, Mrs. Bell!” said Yolande, with that forced calmness of demeanour almost breaking down. “I cannot go away without bidding him good-bye!”

The old woman stopped arranging the flowers she had gathered.

“I canna send to search the whole county o’ Inverness,” she said, reflectively, “and wha kens where he may be? If he’s no back by school-time, he’s off for the day—ay, and without a biscuit in his pocket, I’ll be warrant. But it’s just possible he has only gaen doon to the burn to get a trout or two; I can send

one o' the lassies to see. And though I've never kenned him to go up to the water-wheel at this time o' the morning, I canna gang wrang in making the bell ring. If you'll just hold the flowers for a minute, my dear young leddy, I'll go into the house and see what can be done."

She held the flowers mechanically ; she did not look at them ; her eyes were "otherwhere." But when Mrs. Bell came back, she recalled herself ; and, with such calmness as she could command, she showed the old lady all the arrangements she had made with regard to the household of Allt-nam-ba, and gave her the lists that she had carefully drawn out. And Mrs. Bell would hear of no such thing as thanks or gratitude ; she said people were well off who could be of any little service to them they liked ; and intimated that she was proud to do this for the sake of the young lady who had been kind enough to take notice of her.

"And so you are going away for a while," said the old Scotchwoman, cheerfully. "Ay, ay. But coming back soon again, I hope. Indeed, my dear young leddy, if it wasna a

kind o' presumption on my part, I would say to ye, as they say in the old ballad, ‘O, when will ye be back again, my hinnie and my dear?’ For, indeed, since ye came to Alltnam-ba, it has just been something to gladden an auld woman’s een.”

“What is the ballad, Mrs. Bell?” Yolande said, quickly. She wished to evade these friendly inquiries. And already she was beginning to wonder whether she had enough strength and courage to force herself to go without seeing him and saying this last word to him.

“The ballad? Oh, that was the ballad o’ young Randal,” said Mrs. Bell, in her good-natured, garrulous way. “Maybe ye never heard that one?—

‘Young Randal was a bonnie lad, when he gaed awa’,
A braw, braw lad was he, when he gaed awa’.

That is how it begins; and then they a’ come doon to see him ride off—his father and his mother, and his two sisters; but, as ye may imagine,

‘His bonny cousin Jean lookit o’er the castle wa’,
And far aboon the lave let the tears doon fa’.

Then it goes on—

“O when will ye be back again ?” sae kindly did she speir ;
“O when will ye be back again, my hinnie and my dear ?”
“As soon as I have won enough o’ Spanish gear
To dress ye a’ in silks and lace, my dear.”’

That was the way o’ those times, and mony a sair heart was the consequence. Will I tell ye the rest o’ the story ?”

“Oh yes, Mrs. Bell, if you please,” said Yolande ; though now she was scanning the vacant hillsides with a wistful and troubled eye. Was he not coming, then ? Must she go away without that last word ?

“Ye see, my young leddy, the story jumps over a good many years now, and he comes back to seek out his true love Jean.”

“Ah yes,” said Yolande, with more of interest, “to see whether she has been faithful to him, is it not ? And of course she is. It is so easy for one to remain faithful—in a ballad, where nothing happens but the fancy of the poet. And then, if she was not faithful, who would write about her ? She would be contemptible—that is all.”

“No so fast, my dear young leddy, no so fast. Just listen to the story :—

'Young Randal was an altered man when he came hame,
 A sair altered man was he when he came hame,
 Wi' a star on his breast and a Sir to his name.
 And wi' gray, gray locks Sir Randal came hame.

He rode to the castle, and he rispit at the ring,
 And down came our lady to bid him ride in ;
 And round her bonnie bairnies were playin' on the green :
 "Can this auld wife be my true love Jean?"

"And whatna dour auld carle is this?" quoth the dame,
 "Sae griff and sae stiff, sae feckless and sae lame?"

Quoth he: "My bonny leddy, were ye sweet Jeanie
 Graham?"

"Indeed, good sir, ye have guessed my very name."

O ! dool on the wars in the High Germanie !
 And dool on the poortith o' our ain countrie !
 And dool on the heart that unfaithful can be !—
 For they've wrecked the bravest man in the whole
 countrie !'¹

Ye see it's a sad story enough ; but I'm no
 sure whether to blame the wars in the High
 Germanie, or the poverty o' the old Scotch
 families, or the young lass changing her mind.
 Maybe if she had been less anxious for silks
 and lace, and maybe if he had been less
 anxious to hae a Sir to his name, he might
 hae bided at home and married her, and lived
 happily enough. It's the way o' young

¹ Probably this version of the ballad is very imperfect,
 as it is put down here from memory.

people never to be satisfied. And here is Mr. Melville going away just when everything was ready for his taking back the land that belonged to his own people and settling down on it as he ought."

"Perhaps he will not go—perhaps he is not going, Mrs. Bell!" she said, in a despairing kind of way; for well she knew if he were indeed going what was the cause.

Then she looked at her watch. Well, she had still about fifteen minutes to spare; and she was determined to stay till the last moment if it were needful. But there was no figure coming along the road; no living thing visible on these vacant hillsides; nor a sign of life along the wide moorland of the valley. She was grateful for Mrs. Bell's talking; it lessened the overstrain of the suspense somehow; she had to force herself to listen, in a measure. And again and again she expressed the hope that there must be a mistake—that Mr. Melville was not really going away.

"It's no my place to ask," the old lady said, doubtfully, "but he had a long talk when he came home yesterday wi' the lad

Dalrymple, and I jalouse it was about his being able to carry on the school by himself. It's just that vexatious, my dear young leddy! and yet it canna be helped. I darena say a word. He's a headstrong man, and he's to be managed only wi' a good deal o' skill ; and if he thought I was any kind o' encumbrance, or expected him to do this, that, or the other, he would be off in a gliff. But the vexatiousness o't to be sure! It was only the day before yesterday that I wrote to the lawyers again. I'm no gaun to tell ye, my young leddy, what they said about the price o' Monaglen, for it might get about, and I'm no wanting him to ken what I paid for it, if I get it. But I found I could easy buy it, and have a good nest-egg for him besides ; besides my own £220 a year or thereabouts ; and sae I wrote to they lawyers just asking them in a kind o' way to get me the refusal of the place for a freend o' mine. And then yesterday morning I began and argued wi' mysel'. I coveted the place, that's the truth. And says I, 'Kirsty, what's the use o' being ower cunning? If ye want to buy Monaglen, tell them. A braw thing now if it were to slip

through your fingers, and be snappit up by somebody else ; wadna ye be a disappointed woman a' the days o' your life ?' And so, as second thochts are best, I just sat down and told them plump and plain that if Monaglen was to be got for that, here was a woman that would take it for that ; and telled them to make the bargain, and drive a nail into it there and then ; and that a' the other things — a' the whigmaleeries they invent just to make poor folk pay money—could be settled after. And to think o' him going away the now, just when the night's post or maybe the morn's night's post is almost sure to bring me a telegram—I declare it's too provokin'!"

"But perhaps he is not going away," said Yolande, gently. And then she added, suddenly, and with her face grown a deadly white: "Mrs. Bell, that is Mr. Melville coming down the hill. I wish to speak a word or two to him by himself."

"Oh yes, yes, why not?" said Mrs. Bell, cheerfully. "I am just going indoors to put a bit string round the flowers for ye. And there's a wee bit basket, too, ye maun take ;

I made a few sweets, and comfits, and such things, for ye last night, that'll help to amuse ye on the journey.”

She did not hear; she was regarding him as he approached. His features were as pale as her own; his lips were thin and white. When he came to her, he stood before her, with his eyes cast down, like one guilty. The pallor of his face was frightful.

“I have come because you sent for me,” he said. “But there is nothing you can say to me that I have not said to myself.”

“Do you think I have come to reproach you? No. It is I who have to bear the blame,” she answered with apparent calmness. Then she added: “I—I sent for you because I could not go away without a word of good-bye.”

Here she stopped, fearful that her self-possession would desert her. Her hands were tightly clenched; and unconsciously she was nervously fingering her engagement ring.

“I do not see,” she said, speaking in a measured way, as if to make sure she should not break down, “why the truth should not

be said between us—it is the last time. I did not know ; you did not know ; it was all a misfortune ; but I ought to have known—I ought to have guarded myself—it is I who am to blame. Well, if I have to suffer, it is no matter ; it is you that I am sorry for——”

“ Yolande, I cannot have you talk like that !” he exclaimed.

“ One moment,” she said—and strangely enough her French accent seemed more marked in her speech, perhaps because she was not thinking of any accent. “ One moment. When I am gone away, do not think that I regret having met you and known you. It has been a misfortune for you ; for me, no. It has been an honour to me that you were my friend, and an education, also ; you have shown me what this one or that one may be in the world ; I had not known it before ; you made me expect better things. It was you who showed me what I should do ; do not think that I shall forget what I owe you ; whatever happens I will try to think of what you would expect from me ; and that will be my ambition. I wished to say this to you before I went away,” said

she, and now her fingers were trembling somewhat, despite her enforced calmness. And also that—that, if one cannot retrieve the past, if one has the misfortune to bring suffering on—”

“Yolande, Yolande,” said he, earnestly, and he looked up and looked into her eyes, “do not speak of it—do not think of it any more! Put it behind you. You are no longer a girl; you are a woman; you have a woman’s duties before you. Whatever is past, let that be over and gone. If any one is to blame, it has not been you. Look before you; forget what is behind; do you know that it is not a light matter you have undertaken?”

He was firmer than she was; he regarded her calmly—though still his face was of a ghastly paleness

She hesitated for a moment or two; then she glanced around.

“I wish you to—to give me a flower,” she said, “that I may take it with me.”

“No,” he said, at once. “No. Forget everything that has happened here, except the duty you owe to others.”

“That I have deserved,” she said, in a low voice. “Good-bye.”

She held out her hand. He took it and held it; and there was a great compassion in his eyes. To her they seemed glorified eyes, the eyes of a saint, full of a sad and yearning pity.

“Yolande,” said he, and the tones of his voice seemed to reach her very heart; “I have faith in you. I shall hear of you. Be worthy of yourself. Now, God bless you, and good-bye!”

“*Adieu! adieu!*” she murmured; and then, white-faced and all trembling, but still dry-eyed and erect, she got through the house somehow, and out to the front, where Mrs. Bell was awaiting her by the side of the dog-cart.

When she had driven away, Mrs. Bell remained for a minute or two looking after the departing vehicle—and, perhaps, rather regretfully too, for she had taken a great liking to this bright young English lady who had come into these wilds; but presently she was recalled from her reveries or regrets by the calling of Mr. Melville. She went into the house at once.

“Now, Mrs. Bell,” said he (and he seemed in an unusual hurry), “do you think one of the girls could hunt out for me the waterproof coat that has the strap attached to it for slinging over the shoulders? And I suppose she could pack me some bit of cold meat, or something of the kind, and half a loaf in a little parcel?”

“Dear me, sir, I will do that mysel’; but where are ye going, sir, if I may ask?”

The fact was that it was so unusual for Jack Melville to take any precautions of this kind—even when he was starting for a long day’s fishing on some distant moorland loch—that Mrs. Bell instantly jumped to the conclusion that he was bent on some very desperate excursion.

“Where am I going?” he said. “Why, across the hills to Kingussie, to catch the night-train to London.”

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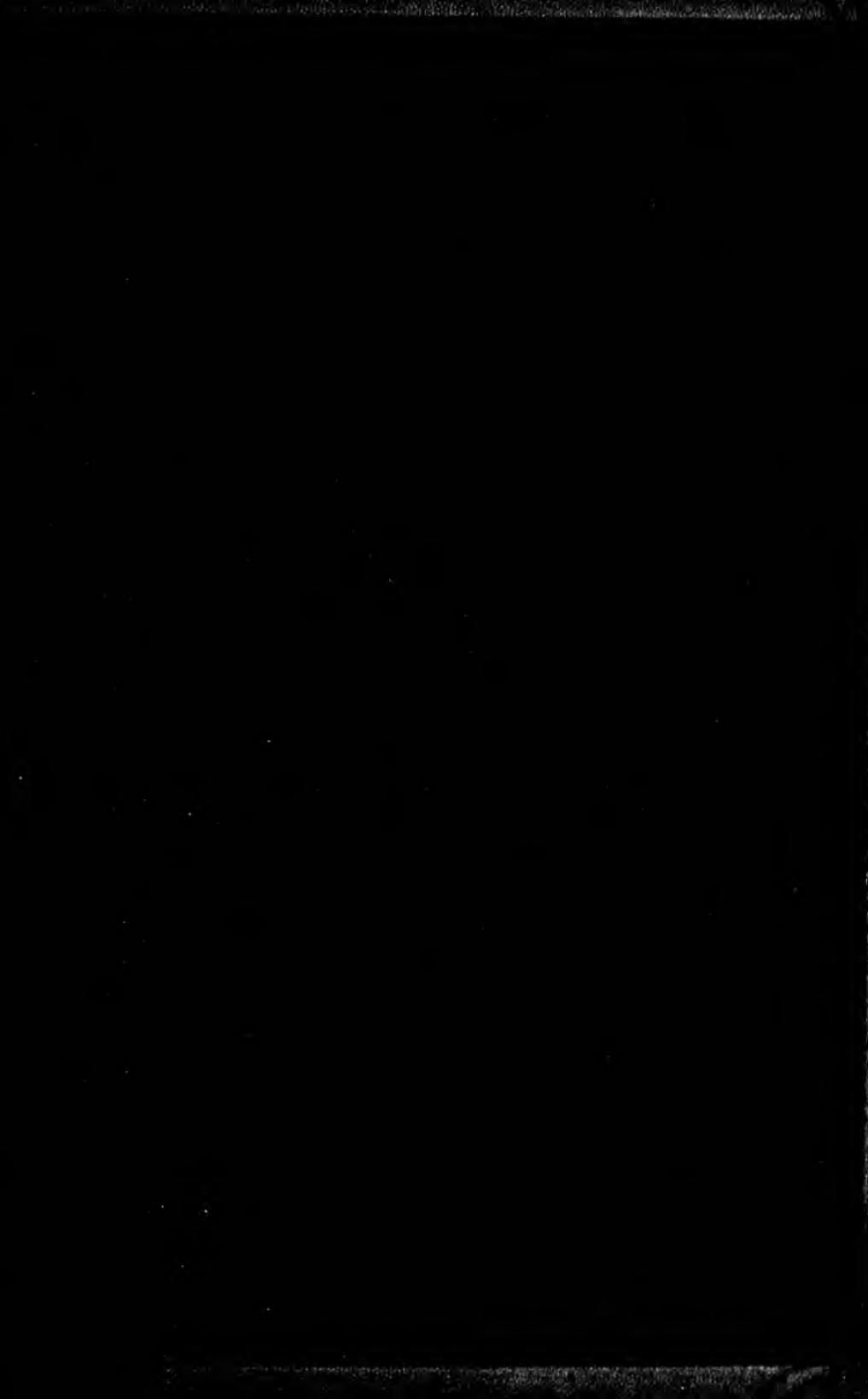
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